



THE INDEPENDENT

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TUESDAY 8 APRIL 1997

WEATHER: Warm and sunny

(IR45P) 40p



COMMENT



IN THE TABLOID:



INSIDE THE TABLOID:
16-PAGE PULL-OUT
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National gesture of defiance ... but a sombre horse race

Kathy Marks and Ian Burrell

The 150th Grand National went ahead at Aintree yesterday, 48 hours late, two horses short and with one vital element of the world's greatest steeplechase missing: the buzz.

Monday afternoon, a time of day more often associated with children's television, was over going to attract the 70,000-strong crowd who attended the postponed race on Saturday.

But in a gesture of defiance to the IRA, a larger than expected turnout of more than 20,000, including the Prime Minister, arrived at Aintree to watch Lord Gyllene cruise home at 14-1.

The course was swamped by more than 500 police officers and 300 security guards. Cars were banned and racegoers given body searches at the turnstiles. Police even checked the paddock railings with mine detectors. The "spirit of the blitz" atmosphere was given added poignancy by the presence before the race of the Gurkhas' military band.

After arriving unexpectedly by helicopter, John Major said: "The whole of the British nation and people around the world wish to see this race run and wish to indicate to people you cannot stop a great national sporting institution like the British Grand National."

"I think the message to the IRA is you cannot bomb the British out of British National Institutions. You cannot bomb Britain out of Northern Ireland. And you cannot bomb Northern Ireland out of the UK."

Earlier, the Princess Royal had been driven onto the course to cheers from the stands. But the usual carnival atmosphere of National day was missing, replaced by a sombre mood among crowds watching constantly by security staff. Police asked people to cast a suspicious eye over the punter standing next to them as part of a policy of "continuous search".

Bookmakers said they had never known a National like it. "Come on, let's have a bit of jollity," William Price, one of a small number of bookies, implored punters. Peter O'Sullivan, commenting on the race for his 50th and final time, said: "It is less charismatic. A certain amount of drama always associated with it has been displaced by this painful interim."

The crowd was allowed in free and many present were more interested in showing solidarity against the terrorists than in backing the winner. "We came back to prove a point," said Chris Stock of Maclefield. "It's part of the British resolve not to be intimidated."

The only major scare came four hours before the 5pm start of the race, when a suspect package was found and destroyed in the County Stand.

The gallows humour meant that there was heavy backing for Go Ballistic, one of the most fancied horses. In the event, it was not even placed.

National reports, Sport

QUICKLY

Netanyahu unmoved
Middle East peace hopes receded with a speech in Washington by Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Prime Minister, in which he vowed to continue with his settlements policy. Page 14

Pop wedding
Oasis star Liam Gallagher and Patsy Kensit married in a secret ceremony. Page 2



Flying end: Philip Hide coming off Spuffington as he jumps Becher's Brook during the 150th Grand National at Aintree yesterday. The race was won by Lord Gyllene

Photograph: Ross Kinaird/Allsport

A soap opera election?

Anthony Devins and Jojo Moyes

The blue chip Tory seat of Tatton in Cheshire was set to become the focal point of a political soap opera yesterday as, amid the most bizarre scenes witnessed in a general election campaign for decades, the veteran BBC foreign correspondent Martin Bell defied the former Tory minister Neil Hamilton to stand down.

Mr Bell was given a political baptism of fire at a London press conference where, thoroughly mauled by media colleagues, he nervously bared his soul and his private life, and announced his willingness to stand on an "anti-sleaze" ticket against Mr Hamilton - the man at the centre of the Commons cash-for-questions affair.

Soon afterwards, Mr Hamilton emerged from his constituency home. A statement was delivered by his wife, and Bill Roache, the *Coronation Street* actor, who is a friend of the couple.

Mr Bell told his London press conference that he was non-political as anyone could see: he had had meetings with the Labour and Liberal Democrat candidates for Tatton, and their parties, but was in nobody's pocket. If Mr Hamilton did not stand, nobody would be more pleased, but if he beat Mr Hamilton for the seat, he was prepared to serve as MP for the full five-year parliamentary term.

He said: "I have been aware of the deep unhappiness of the people there. It's as if there's a kind of poison in the democ-



Screen guest: Coronation Street actor Bill Roache (left) with Neil and Christine Hamilton who had invited him for lunch at their home in Cheshire. Photograph: Reuters

INSIDE

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election '97

Leading article, page 17; Time for change says senior Tory, page 17; Polly Toynbee, page 19; Election countdown, pages 8-11

tic system which means the democratic system is not able to operate."

But the Hamiltons accused Mr Bell of being the "anti-fair play" candidate and a "stooge" of Peter Mandelson, Labour's campaign manager. Mrs Hamilton said: "If you think we are going to chicken out, three-and-a-half weeks before polling day, you are all mad."

In his statement, Mr Hamilton said: "Mr Bell knows I have strenuously denied any allegation of corruption. I believe

the Downey inquiry will clear me of this charge."

"We know nothing of Mr Bell's opinions, save one - he is against the basic principle of British justice, that a man is innocent unless proven guilty. He condemns me without seeing the evidence."

Mr Bell said: "I believe there is a deep disquiet in the public at large about our standards of conduct in public life. It is in everybody's interest that we sort this out. I believe the British people want this."

Having explained in intimate detail the 48 hours it took to accept the principle that he might stand - before embarking on a clandestine visit to the constituency on Sunday - Mr Bell suggested that he could not have lived with himself if he had ducked the challenge.

"I could think of lots and lots of reasons for saying this is none of my business, in the same way that I can think of lots and lots of reasons for not testifying to the war crimes tribunal in The Hague."

"It's not what I'm about. I'm a hack, like you," he told reporters, adding: "There are some things in life that you don't enjoy doing, but sometimes you like having done. I think it might turn out to be one of those."

The electorate in true-blue Tatton is not used to uncertainties, but they appeared confused as to Mr Bell's role, and undecided as to how they would vote yesterday.

What was clear was that whichever candidate they supported, both Mr Hamilton's supporters and detractors felt that without the conclusions of the Downey Report, they were unable to make their decision based on the "true facts".

Jill Bradbury, of Knutsford and District Animal Trust, who had voted for Mr Hamilton in previous elections, said that the persisting sleaze allegations meant they had heard little about policies. "We haven't had enough information about anybody. If the Downey report had come out at least we would have known where we stood with Hamilton."

She was unclear as to what Martin Bell was actually standing for, in terms of policies, but felt, as did many others, that the strength of his personality might make for a good result among a local population "sick" that Mr Hamilton hadn't resigned.

Omar Ashkan of the Knutsford Picture Shop said he would vote Conservative as always, because his vote was cast "for the party rather than the person". He said: "I don't know if Hamilton is guilty or not. But this area is true blue. Even if he

loses 75 per cent of his majority he'll still get in."

Mr Ashkan's comments came as a poll in yesterday's *Manchester Evening News* showed that although the majority of Conservative voters believed the former trade minister should stand down, Mr Hamilton would win the seat with a reduced majority if he toughed it out.

Mr Bell's arrival apparently wrecked plans by councillor Tony Martin, one of the few members of the Tatton Conservative Association to speak out for a secret ballot on Mr Hamilton's candidature. He said Mr Bell's intervention would mean that there was now only token resistance to the MP's re-election.



Labour unseats its old guard

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Tony Blair's campaign managers have launched an initiative to lever veteran MPs out of their seats to make way for favoured newcomers.

Pressure has been brought on the MPs to go, with some being offered seats in the House of Lords. Since the election was called three weeks ago, six Labour MPs have resigned, all of them in safe seats. Last night others said they had been asked to leave but had refused.

Ray Powell, a former Labour whip, said he had been asked to give up his Welsh seat but was determined to stay on.

He accused Peter Mandelson, the party's campaign organiser, of masterminding the exercise.

Mr Powell, 67, who has represented Ogmore since 1979, said the party leadership used go-betweens to persuade people to go. In his case, Ron Davies, the shadow Welsh secretary, and Don Dixon, the MP for Jarrow, had both been unsuccessful, he said.

"They say I am able to advise you that you can go across to the Lords and in all probability you will get a job, something to do in a Labour government," he said.

"It isn't my intention to give up now. I have always said I wanted to stay on

"Peter Mandelson will keep on the pressure to see if he can get everybody he wants in and all that he doesn't want out."

Another MP who did not want to be named, said he also had been approached.

"I was asked, would I consider doing an important job for the party after the election, provided Labour won," he said. Although one or two members usually announce their retirements after a general election has been called, it is believed that never before have so many decided to do so.

Three seats, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, St Helens South and Warrington South, have already been filled.

In each case, the hopefuls were asked to send CVs to party headquarters within three days of the resignations. Shortlists were drawn up by a panel of the National Executive Committee. Local members were then allowed to vote in one-member-one-vote ballots.

The Labour candidate for Cumbernauld will be Rosemary McKenna, a former president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and a member of The Network, a strongly Blairite group which is based in Scotland. She replaces Norman Hogg.

In Warrington South, local members were angry that at least two popular choices were

left off the shortlist after Doug Hoyle resigned. They chose Helel Jones, a solicitor from Widnes, over three London-based choices.

In St Helens, John Evans is to be replaced by Dave Watts, the MP's agent and the local council leader.

The final selection for a replacement for Geoffrey Loft-house, member for Pontefract and Castleford, was taking place last night.

A spokesman for the Labour Party said he understood the two selections would be made in the same way.

A spokesman for Mr Mandelson said he did not comment on such allegations.

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news

significant shorts

British Jews appeal to Swiss for justice over Nazi gold

British Jews yesterday appealed to Swiss business leaders to do all in their power to ensure that truth, justice and solidarity emerge in the inquiry into looted Nazi gold.

Greville Janner, Labour MP and chairman of the Holocaust Educational Trust, told a meeting of the British-Swiss Chamber of Commerce in Zurich that the 1946 post-war gold agreement must be renegotiated. An estimated £3bn, at today's prices, of looted gold from Nazi Germany was paid into Swiss banks during the Second World War. But under the Washington Agreement with Britain, the United States and France, Switzerland paid back less than half the total gold assets held.

"I hope that in the interests of solidarity and justice, the Swiss government will agree to that renegotiation," Mr Janner said.

Switzerland, which has suffered a powerful international backlash, has bowed to pressure and announced plans for a commission of experts to investigate the country's wartime dealings with Nazi Germany. New legislation will temporarily lift Swiss banks' secrecy laws so that the issue can be finally cleared up.

Scottish police to test CS spray

Two Scottish police forces are to test CS sprays in response to an increase in the number of assaults on officers, it was announced yesterday.

Officers in Strathclyde and Tayside will test the sprays which have already been on trial in England and Wales, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (Acpas) said.

William Speece, president of Acpas and Chief Constable of Tayside, told a press conference in Edinburgh that more than 10,000 Scottish officers were assaulted in 1995-1996, which resulted in 2,600 days being lost through sickness.

"Although crime has been declining, the number of incidents of assaults on police officers has been increasing," he said. The pilot scheme is expected to be underway by October and to be concluded by next spring, and will involve around 200 officers in Strathclyde and 90 in Dundee. The two forces were chosen because they had the worst records for assaults among Scottish police.

Man charged with teenager's death



Detectives hunting the killer of teenager Louise Smith have charged a 21-year-old man with her murder.

The unnamed man, from the Yate area of Bristol, lives just 400 yards from the disused Barnhill quarry where the 18-year-old's naked and decomposed body was found on 17 February last year. Louise, from nearby Chipping Sodbury, was last seen early on Christmas morning 1995, apparently walking home alone from a disco. Avon and

Somerset police said the man, whom they did not name, would appear before North Avon magistrates this morning.

Warning over paedophile index

The planned publication of a book giving details about convicted sex offenders in the United Kingdom has been condemned as being likely to encourage a growing trend towards vigilantism.

A New Zealand journalist, Deborah Coddington, intends to publish a British index of paedophiles in October, similar to directories she has brought out in her home country and in Australia. She declared it was time to stop treating the perpetrators of such crimes as victims and called on the public to monitor the activities of paedophiles once they had been released from prison.

But John Scott, of the Scottish Council for Civil Liberties, warned the book could encourage people to take the law into their own hands. He told BBC Scotland's *Frontline* programme, to be broadcast tonight, that if people had such information they might decide "well, I'm just going to go round and pay a visit to this sex offender".

Killer refused right to attend birth

A convicted killer lost a court bid yesterday to be at the birth of his child next week. James Kelly's application for judicial review was dismissed in the High Court in Belfast. Kelly, 29, of Londonderry, is serving life for murder in Maghaberry Prison, near Lisburn, Co Antrim. His child was conceived during an "inter-institutional" visit to his wife Denise who is also serving a prison sentence, for robbery.

Welsh Water fined £8,000

Welsh Water was fined £8,000 with £3,000 costs yesterday after admitting supplying water unfit for human consumption to part of Swansea. The city's magistrates heard that strongly alkaline, unpleasant-tasting water from a disused mains pipe entered the tap supply for 300 homes in the Parc Gwynn Road area. A faulty valve was probably to blame, and the water had been contaminated by chemicals leaching out of the lining of the old pipe. The only casualty of the leak, Welsh Water said, was a goldfish. Nicholas Schoon

people



Patsy Kensit and Liam Gallagher: Low-key celebration (Photograph: Crispin Jones)

Wedding vows at dawn as Patsy and Liam fool media

The celebrity wedding of the year finally happened yesterday when the infant-terrible of rock'n'roll, Liam Gallagher of Oasis, married the actress Patsy Kensit at Westminster register office.

But the simple ceremony in central London at 8.30 yesterday morning was missing the glitz and glamour expected of such a show business union. Liam, 24, and Patsy, 29, did not invite any friends or family to the ceremony, Oasis's record company said.

Nor will there be a party or honeymoon because the couple are too busy. A spokesman for Creation Records said: "Their parents were not there and no other members of the band. It was totally, totally private with just them and the registrar."

"They chose that office because it is the appropriate one of the area in which they live. They don't want a party because it will be turned into a media circus and they are too busy to go on honeymoon."

"No one knew about this until it happened because they wanted to keep it absolutely secret."

A statement from Creation read: "The couple are extremely happy and very pleased that they have been able to tie the knot without any intrusions."

Although Sir Paul McCartney married Linda Eastman at the same office in 1969, Creation denies that had anything to do with the choice of venue by Liam and Patsy.

The spokesman said: "There is the common idea that they are now." The couple were due to wed in February but cancelled owing to "obsessive media attention".

Patsy's last marriage in 1992 to Jim Kerr, singer of the group Simple Minds, ended in a near riot as photographers and minders fought outside her home in Oxford. They divorced last October.

This is Patsy's third marriage - she wed Don McLean from the band Big Audio Dynamite in 1994, after three months.

Matthew Grace

Fred Perry trophies to go under hammer

The tennis trophies and medals of Fred Perry, Britain's last Wimbledon men's singles champion, are to be sold at auction by his family. Perry, who died in 1995, won the men's singles title in 1934, 1935 and 1936 and the mixed doubles in 1935 and 1936.

His three men's trophies, then known as the Renshaw Cup, are among memorabilia being sold. Enthusiasts can also bid for gold medals which accompanied the Renshaw Cups. A racket used for one of the three triumphs is expected to fetch £2,000.

Christie's, which is overseeing the London auction on 20 June, three days before Wimbledon begins, estimates the 75 lots will fetch up to £150,000. Jill Potterton, of Christie's, said: "He remains a hugely significant figure in British tennis, not least because no Briton has managed to win it since."

Perry, pictured, also won the US Open three times and a cup he was given to keep on his third victory is estimated to be worth up to £20,000 at the auction. He led Britain to four consecutive victories in the Davis Cup between 1933 and 1936 and the gold medal he was awarded for the initial win



is included in the sale. Also being auctioned is a miniature bronze sculpture of Perry which is estimated to fetch between £3,000 and £5,000. It is a copy of the full-size statue which stands in the tennis grounds at Wimbledon.

Many of the items, including the Wimbledon trophies, have been on display at the Wimbledon Museum at the All England Lawn Tennis Club in south-west London.

The museum was originally offered all the items at the auction by Mr Perry's family for £250,000. It declined, saying that many pieces were not relevant to Wimbledon.

Mark Rowe

Third time lucky for CSA chief

Today the third chief executive of the controversial Child Support Agency in four years will take up her post. Faith Boardman, a career civil servant, is also the third woman to hold the post following Ros Hepplewhite and Ann Chant.

Mrs Boardman was appointed by Peter Lilley, Secretary of State for Social Security, last month. She is the former chief executive of the Contributions Agency, responsible for 10,000 staff, an annual budget of £240m and for collecting £42bn of National Insurance contributions.

Ann Chant resigned last November. She was credited with saving the agency from collapse but faced constant difficulties after replacing Mrs Hepplewhite in 1994 at the height of controversy over the CSA's performance.

Mrs Boardman will be paid around £80,000. Her contract is for five years.

After graduating from Oxford she joined HM Customs and Excise and in 1989 she was appointed Customs and Excise Collector for central London, responsible for 600 staff and for gathering a major portion of the department's revenue from VAT. She was made chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She is married with two children.

Glenda Cooper

briefing

EDUCATION

Environmental teaching 'indoctrinating children'

Environmental education is indoctrinating children with a "sentimental, unthinking and ill-founded attitude to nature", according to a report by a government curriculum adviser. Professor Anthony O'Hear claims schools have exchanged "value-neutral" nature study for "decades of propaganda about human effects on the environment".

Pupils are now "bombarded with tracts about ozone layers and sustainable environments and graphic representations of seal-clubbing, whaling and other forms of what are uncritically presented as pure human wickedness," he says.

As a result, children are developing a hostility towards "many of the achievements of our civilisation", even though it is natural for man to transform nature, according to Professor O'Hear, a member of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA).

His report, *Nonsense About Nature*, published by the Social Affairs Unit, flies in the face of parental opinion on environmental education, revealed in a survey earlier this year for an SCAA-appointed panel of government advisers on values in education.

The MORI poll found almost universal agreement with the statement that schools should teach children to "value the natural world as a source of wonder and inspiration, and accept our duty to maintain a sustainable environment for the future". Lucy Ward

SPORT

Black mark for football

It is a game of two halves. It is also, apparently, a game of two colours. Black footballers tend to get paid less than their white counterparts, despite the fact that they have longer careers, score more goals, and more likely to play for the national side, claims Dr Stefan Szymanski, of London University's Imperial College.

Premier League clubs are among the worst offenders, spending around £70,000 less for a black player, said Dr Szymanski whose report will be studied by the Commission for Racial Equality.

Dr Szymanski's findings are based on a comparison of the wage bills and league positions of 39 clubs between 1978 and 1993. It showed that those with more black players achieved higher positions, but had lower wage bills.

The Centre for Football Research at Leicester University agreed black players were paid less, but said differences might be linked to other factors, such as age and inexperience. Kim Sengupta



HEALTH

Herbal drinks a sham, says 'Which?'

Herbal drinks are more hype than help - if it is refreshment or revitalisation you want, you would be better off with a cup of tea or a can of cola, according to *Which?* While health-conscious consumers are paying large amounts of money for drinks containing such things as prickly ash bark, ginkgo biloba and ginseng, their promises to pep you up and fight off fatigue are a sham, said the Consumers' Association magazine.

Rob Ashton, *Which?* managing editor, said: "Current law is lagging behind the marketing hype - and not all the manufacturers we spoke to could back up their claims."

In a survey of 16 consumers - two groups, one of which drank herbal drinks and the other which did not - both groups identified drinks such as Furey's, Amé and Aqua Libra as "health drinks", seeing them as "natural" and "in tune with your body". But the association says the evidence for makers' claims of refreshment and rejuvenation was "scandalously poor". Glenda Cooper

INDUSTRY

Job insecurity on the increase

More than one in three workers believe their jobs are less secure than a year ago despite claims that the "feelgood" factor has returned. A survey by the Manufacturing Science and Finance union, which polled 388 firms, said there had been a "marginally favourable" shift in workers' attitudes to job security compared to previous surveys. However, the union said it was clear workers were not experiencing a "feelgood effect".

Some 37 per cent said their jobs were less secure than a year ago, with most job insecurity reported in financial services and the NHS. Fewer than one in five said their jobs were more secure than this time last year.

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تحتفظ من الأصل

Matthew Brace

14 years in jail for man who used his job to target young unattached victims

cause of difficulties in finding enough female cabbies.

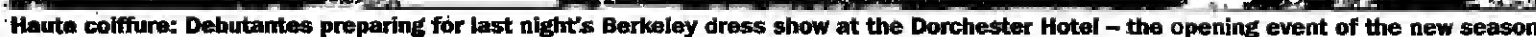
Val Taylor, owner of the Hackney and Islington branches of Ladycabs, said: "The biggest problem is getting women drivers. We can get them to work a couple of hours a day, but that's not a lot of good. Some have family commitments, and you can't advertise for them, because of the sexual discrimination law."

She urged women not to get in the first cab they saw when leaving a pub or night club.

The debutante tradition, is still going strong,
Michael Streeter reports

The Berkeley dress show takes the form of a fashion parade - with clothes from the distinctly egalitarian firm. Next - in which the debutante models, watched by adoring parents, have been trained to

"If it keeps changing and keeps its social conscience I can see it continuing into the new millennium."



Photograph: Andrew Buurman

Marriage, apparently, is no longer the main object.

"It used to be about meeting a nice young man," admits Ms Kark.

"But now most parents would be horrified if a Deb came home at the end of the season and said 'I'm engaged.'"

Mark Rowe and Cofin Blackstock

Educating palates: The campaign to become a big cheese

formalist, says, "I don't know English cheese ended."

Said the embassy: "In all honesty, the domestic market for cheese in the UK is much smaller than the French market. We are just not the cheese eaters the French are. As a result, sales of British cheese in France are tiny."

Wrote J. Spencer, the main adviser for British cheese in France through its 20 years, says cheese ac-

counts for 2 per cent of total food sales, Eric Barraud, merchandiser for prepared and dairy foods, adds: "Our share of the French cheese market is .000 something. Too small to measure. But in volume terms, we sold 125 tons of English cheese last year."

The next push in the campaign comes later this month with a drive into Marseilles and Lyon, and then on to Lille in June and Bordeaux in September.

was worth £500m a year. It is now worth £340m, according to Department of Trade and Industry figures.

Fish, with a French-export market worth £250m in 1996 is the second largest market. Cereals (£126m), tea and coffee (£65m) and fruit and vegetables (£40m) are the next most popular goods selling in France. These exports to France are worth £20m.

Mr Davis admits that Gallic pride in French cuisine creates a formidable cultural gap for the British food industry to tackle. "There is a barrier," he said. "We recognise the French have their own high-quality goods and a wonderful heritage. But we can also provide quality and innovation and that's something the French respect. We are playing to our strengths."

Foodline article page 10.

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Overspent health authority in chaos

Louise Jury

A health authority which ended the financial year with the largest deficit in the country was run in an "environment of confusion," auditors have said.

The West Surrey Health Authority, which overspent its £330m budget by more than £14m, had no basic processes for controlling its expenditure, their report found.

The findings have angered local campaigners who were accused of "scaremongering" by Virginia Bottomley, the MP for Surrey South-West, when details of the crisis first emerged.

Three community health councils, which represent patients in the area, have also passed motions of no confidence in the authority.

They have called a public meeting today to keep up pressure. Spokesman Tony Mallard said: "If this was the Ridings

School, the department of education would be in here crawling all over it. It isn't and nothing is happening."

The investigation by the accountants KPMG found the budget-setting and contracting process last year "lacked a coherent framework."

Different staff had different approaches to contracts and their roles were not always clear.

"This created an environ-

ment of confusion and frustration and tension developed between the finance and the commissioning directorates," the report found.

There was "no clear mechanism for communication" which increased the chance of errors and omissions in the budgets.

The report concluded: "Poor budgetary procedures and an excess of optimism at the start of the year resulted in a budget being set which was far too low,

giving the authority's known and likely commitments."

The authority has been forced to delay signing this year's contracts for services because of the problems and will have to absorb cuts of £10m to balance the books.

Despite reassurances that measures have been taken, Mr Mallard said the three councils were not satisfied.

"It's a catalogue of confusion, mal-administration and lack of

control. The organisation is in chaos according to the report."

They had written to Stephen Dorrell, the Health Secretary, asking him to send in a team of advisors. "We want to know whether the authority is fit to go into the future," Mr Mallard said.

Neil Sherlock, the Liberal Democrat candidate in Surrey South-West, said action after the election would be too late as contracts for the coming year

would be set by then.

"Give us how the authority have behaved in the last year how can you have confidence in them?" Mr Sherlock said.

An authority spokesman said the same problems would not happen again. He stressed that no money was lost, unaccounted for or wasted.

The difficulties arose at a time when there were changes in senior finance personnel and as the authority was merging

with the former Surrey Family Services Health Authority.

Simon Strachan, chief executive, said: "This year we're confident we've got the budgets right and we're expecting to strike a balanced budget."

Although earlier identification of the scale of the deficit would have led to a quicker recovery, the auditors said this would not have prevented the need for action of the kind the authority was taking.

New body will ensure fair play and keep sport out of court

Ian Burrell

British sport is to set up an independent arbitration panel to keep disputes involving players and athletes out of the law courts.

The move follows increasing concern among the sporting authorities over the costs and damaging publicity of litigation resulting from incidents on the field of play.

In a succession of high-profile actions sports stars have sued administrators for banning them from competition and players have sued opponents for dangerous play.

The Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR) said this weekend that an independent Sports Dispute Resolution Panel would be in place by the end of the year.

The move was denounced by some sports lawyers who said it was an attempt to "put sport above the law."

Edward Grayson, a barrister and author of Sport and the Law, said: "I regard it as insidious. The law of the land does not stop at the touchline or the boundary."

He added: "The tribunal system could be said to be symbolic of the attempts to conceal the moral corruption in sport and

can easily be as costly as going to court."

But Nigel Hook, head of technical services of the CCPR, which represents 286 British sporting and recreational governing bodies including the Football Association, the Rugby Football Union, the British Athletics Federation and the Lawn Tennis Association, said this was not the case.

"Putting sport above the law is not the intention. The purpose is to stop the increasing cost and time involved in legal cases in court and the increasing desire of individuals to go to court in this country," he said.

"This will preserve the integrity of sport and make sure that the money stays in sport and does not go to solicitors."

A position paper prepared for the CCPR, and seen by The Independent, states: "If two high-profile competitors are in dispute it could tarnish the image of the sport. Mediation can bring disputes to an end quickly, cheaply and confidentially."

The paper adds: "The principle behind an arbitration panel is that disputes would be decided by people interested in sport and not by a judge who may be indifferent or who may not understand the implications for sport or how sport



The tennis player Mats Wilander is fighting a ban by the International Tennis Federation in the courts.

works."

It adds that the independent panel could not prevent police intervention if a criminal offence had been committed.

The clearest image of sport is increasingly being soiled by damaging court cases. In 1994, Chelsea's Paul Elliott successfully sued Dean Saunders of Liverpool for a tackle which ended his career.

A similar case is currently being pursued by Gordon Watson of Bradford City against the Huddersfield Town defender Kevin Gray.

At the same time, players are

increasingly less likely to accept the validity of bans imposed by a sports governing body which prevent them from earning a living. Diane Modahl, the middle distance runner, is suing the British Athletics Federation for £500,000 for loss of earnings during a drugs ban that was later overturned. The rugby player Mark Jones has taken the Welsh Rugby Union to the High Court for banning him for fighting in a game, while the suspended tennis stars Mats Wilander and Karel Novacek are fighting the International Tennis Federation in the



Diane Modahl, the middle distance runner, is suing the British Athletics Federation for £500,000 lost earnings.

London courts over its right to test and ban players for drugs.

Mr Hook said that the new panel would be expected to resolve disputes within a month at minimum cost.

The panel will be made up of volunteers with experience and knowledge of both sport and the law. Several prospective panelists have already been identified. The parties involved in a

dispute would each appoint one arbitrator from a pool of names provided.

Robert Horner, a solicitor member of the RFU committee, said professionalisation meant that bans for thuggery on the field now affected player's livelihoods rather than just their social lives.

He said: "We would be totally supportive of the [independent



Chelsea footballer Paul Elliott (on the ground) sued Dean Saunders of Liverpool in 1994 over a tackle.

arbitration panel] concept.

"It is acknowledged that if you can have a sensible arbitration procedure it's likely to be quicker and less expensive than going through the courts."

The idea is modelled partly on the International Court of Arbitration run by the Olympic authorities in Switzerland, and on similar panels in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Some sporting bodies, including the FA, have expressed a wish to retain their own disciplinary procedures, only resorting to the panel as a last resort.

Last night, other sports lawyers said that "in the real world" they would advise their clients to still go to court because of the chances of winning more in compensation.

Five private rail firms facing financial ruin

Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

Five train companies will have to ask for more cash from the next government to run services, according to a report out yesterday.

The study, conducted by a former transport analyst with City accountants Coopers and Lybrand for Save Our Railways, the pressure group, claimed that many private operators bid so aggressively for train services they will be unable to meet the ambitious targets they have set themselves.

Another four franchises are likely to run into financial difficulties, making losses even if they manage to increase revenues by 16 per cent over seven years.

The loss-making franchises - Cardiff Railways, West Anglia and Great Northern and South Wales and West, Thameslink and Thames Trains - are likely to require more than £500m in extra subsidy in order to keep trains running.

"There has been concern in the rail industry for some time about the way that some of the later franchises were let to bid-

On track for profit or loss			
The Winners			
Service	Owner	Possible profit	
South West Trains	Stagecoach	£479m	
Great Western	Great Western	£462m	
Connex			
South Central	CGEA	£451m	
Great			
North Eastern	Sea Containers	£288m	
InterCity			
West Coast	Virgin	£278m	
The Losers			
Service	Owner	Possible losses	
Thames Trains	Victory Railways	£34.8m	
South Wales & West	Prism	£34.3m	
WAGN	Prism	£27.8m	
Thameslink	Govia	£18.3m	
Cardiff Railways	Prism	£7.9m	

All figures based on a growth rate of 3 per cent a year

ders who were taking a gamble," said Keith Bill, national secretary of Save our Railways.

The City's initial concerns about rail privatisation have meant that many early bids were "given away". South West Trains, which introduced an emergency timetable after cutting driver numbers, is predicted

to make nearly £480m if it grows at 3 per cent a year.

Also likely to make bumper profits are Great Western, which runs express InterCity services from London to the west country and could make £462m, and French-based company CGEA, in line for more than £600m from its two com-

muter services. Campaigners point out that Opra, the government body which let out franchises, realised that some would make money and others would run into difficulties.

Train companies said that the growth forecasts were too low. "In two years we have increased our takings by 50 per cent," said a spokesman for Thames Trains. "So we expect to grow far faster than this report estimates."

The analysis should jolt Labour's rail policy into life. The speed sell-off of British Rail has caught the party off-guard and forced its transport team into a series of embarrassing U-turns - which has culminated in a decision not to take any bankrupt train service into public hands.

"We will consider all the options and as a last resort we will offer a bankrupt train service to private bidders in order to secure the best deal for the taxpayer," said a spokeswoman for Andrew Smith, the shadow Secretary of State for Transport.

Senior railway managers point out that this would mean that the Labour party would be forced into paying more subsidy.

Male officers 'harassed PC'

A policewoman was subjected to nearly three years of victimisation and discrimination by male officers who wanted to get rid of her, an industrial tribunal was told yesterday.

Constable Sharon Empeo, 34, is on extended sick leave after making 40 allegations of sexual discrimination and harassment against five male officers at Doncaster police station in South Yorkshire.

A preliminary tribunal in Sheffield was told that the officer, who lives in Doncaster, was called names and teased about her size, subjected to

"rude behaviour" and forced to behave like one of the lads.

She claims that life was made difficult for her by certain officers, who purposely made themselves unavailable when she needed them, and her performance was subjected to "excessive scrutiny".

After a three-month attachment to a sexual abuse unit, the officer says she was even made to undergo "unlawful questioning and detention" by other officers. It was later suggested that she should resign or she would be dismissed.

PC Empeo is claiming sex

discrimination against South Yorkshire Police. She claims the discrimination began in November 1993 and went on until June 1996, but yesterday's hearing ruled that only three incidents could go before a full tribunal because the other alleged incidents did not occur within the legal time limit.

Louise Varty, for South Yorkshire Police, said: "It is said that, taken together, the allegations amount to a regime of discriminatory behaviour and a regime of victimisation."

PC Empeo claimed that the incidents amounted to an "un-

written" policy of discrimination within the force. She has already used the force's internal grievance procedure but her solicitor, Tina Martin, told the tribunal: "She's done everything within her power to have the matters to which she was being subjected stopped and that did not happen."

The tribunal ruled that the allegations made outside the time limit could not be considered with more recent allegations because there was "no common thread" between them. A full hearing concerning the remaining allegations will be held later.

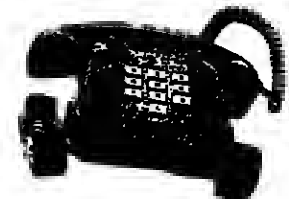
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£5,000 - £24,999	6.2%	7.2%	8.2%
£25,000 - £49,999	8.25%	7.25%	8.25%
£50,000+	6.3%	7.3%	8.3%

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news

Burnings, beatings, torture... another weekend in Northern Ireland



David McKittrick
Ireland Correspondent

Arson attacks on both Catholic and Protestant church property in Northern Ireland were yesterday denounced by the head of the Church of Ireland as "taking sectarianism to the ultimate limit."

The condemnation, from Archbishop Robin Eames, was rigorous and forthright, yet it seems unlikely that it will staunch the tide of burnings which has reached new heights over the last year.

The burnings of churches and church halls have, like paramilitary "punishment" beatings, almost become part of the background static of what might be termed sub-terrorist violence. The hundreds of beatings and scores of burnings have become almost a matter of routine.

Most of the attacks have been on Catholic property, with systematic burnings not just of churches but also of schools in many parts of Northern Ireland. In the latest incidents a blaze destroyed the 200-year-old Mullavilly Catholic Church at Tandragee, Co Armagh late on Sunday night. This was the fifth attack on church property in less than a week.

At the weekend arsonists destroyed another Catholic church, St MacNissi's at Randalstown, Co Antrim, and damaged St Comgall's in Antrim town. A Church of Ireland hall at Donaghmore, Co Tyrone was also damaged.

Such attacks have always been a feature of Northern Ireland, going back well before the outbreak of the troubles in the late 1960s. But last year's Orange stand-off at Drumcree, Co Armagh, produced a rash of incidents, and since then they have been maintained at a high level.

The attacks rarely cause

serious casualties but can spread a great deal of bitterness and mistrust, especially in small rural communities. They also cost substantial amounts of money: damage to schools alone over recent months has been put at around £20m.

Archbishop Eames declared: "Those responsible must not be allowed to claim that they are acting on behalf of the vast majority of decent people in either community. These are one more example of the sickness which lies at the root of so many of our problems here - naked, corrosive sectarianism."

The Catholic bishop of Bishop of Down and Connor, Dr Patrick Walsh, described the attacks as an abomination.

The Mullavilly parish priest, Father Kieran MacOscar, said yesterday: "Our church is completely destroyed. Only four walls remain. A parishioner rang me in the middle of the night to say it was on fire, and by the time I got there the blaze was out of control."

A number of the affected churches were visited by both Catholics and Protestants anxious to express their sympathy. The Rev Brian Harper, the Church of Ireland rector who also lives at Mullavilly, said: "Everyone is very shocked. There is no way the Protestant community here would want anything like this at all."

In the latest punishment attack, meanwhile, loyalists beat a 14-year-old boy in front of his mother in their east Belfast home. A group of masked men broke down the front door with a sledgehammer and beat the boy and a man with pick-axe handles. Each suffered a broken arm.

A Protestant man from Lisburn, Co Antrim, yesterday appeared in court charged with four murders between 1987 and 1989. He was said to have walked into a police station and asked to speak to detectives.



Arsonists destroyed Catholic churches at Laurelvale (top), Randalstown (middle) and St Comgall's in Antrim town



Ellen Terry at 16, as portrayed by her future husband George Watts. They later divorced Photograph: National Portrait Gallery

Wanted: funds to safeguard future of Ellen Terry's shrine

Stephen Goodwin
Heritage Correspondent

Lewis Carroll thought her a "beautiful little creature", Oscar Wilde was besotted and wrote her at least three sonnets, and leading artists painted her and designed her costumes.

In the late 19th century, the actress Ellen Terry had not just the theatrical world in her thrall but an impressive cast of friends and admirers from the less transient arts.

Terry's 20-year partnership with Henry Irving at the Lyceum, alternating Shakespeare with melodrama, stands unparalleled in theatre history. Audiences flocked to see them and London's traffic was brought to a halt on first nights.

This year is the 150th anniversary of Terry's birth in Coventry into a family of "circuit players" who went from town to town. Though she would later correspond with literary figures such as Walt Whitman and assemble a heavily annotated library, Ellen never went to school. The stage was preordained for the young Terry.

The National Trust is using the anniversary to launch a fund-raising campaign for Terry's country retreat, Smalhythe Place, between Tenterden and Rye in Kent. It is also publishing a new glossy guidebook, *Ellen Terry and Smalhythe Place*. The house is almost as remarkable as the woman herself. Half-timbered, with a steeply



Haven of peace: Smalhythe Place - a shrine to Ellen Terry's memory Photograph: Peter Macdarmid

pitched red-tiled roof, it was built in the early 16th century as the Port House. Standing by the garden gate today, it is hard to believe Smalhythe was once a port.

The harbourmaster was long gone and the place known simply as "the farm" when Terry and Irving came upon it while driving around the Kent marshlands. According to the new guide, by Joy Melville, the actress immediately declared that this was where she would like to live and die. Irving told her

to buy it and in 1899 she did.

Smalhythe was Terry's haven from a busy life - she was lecturing and touring in the United States well into her 60s - and she died there in July 1928. Her daughter Edy made the house a shrine, though there is little sombre about it, displaying portraits, posters, many gifts and mementoes from admirers and other actors and actresses, and also some of the lavish costumes that Terry wore in her prime.

Shimmering works of art, there is the costume for Guinevere in King Arthur designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and the dress for Lady Macbeth made famous in a painting of Terry by John Singer Sargent. It is covered in real green beetle wings.

Oscar Wilde observed that while Lady Macbeth "evidently patronises local industries for her husband's clothes ... she takes care to do all her own shopping in Byzantium". *Ellen Terry and Smalhythe Place*: Joy Melville; The National Trust: £2.50

New route to orgasm discovered

Two researchers at an American university believe they have isolated a chemical that produces orgasms in women.

Such a finding could lead one day to a pill that would give a person the same sensation as an orgasm and might have use in treating pain, said Professor Barry R Komisaruk, of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. His research partner was another Rutgers professor, Beverly Whipple, who in

1982 wrote the book *The G-Spot and Other Recent Discoveries About Human Sexualities*.

The researchers focused on a group of women paralysed by spinal cord injuries. In the past, experts have argued that people with such injuries were unable to experience an orgasm.

What Professor Komisaruk found was an alternate pathway to sexual arousal through the vagus nerve, which goes directly from the cervix, through the ab-

domen and chest cavity, into the neck and to the brain stem. A 1995 study measured the women's heart rates, breathing and blood pressure as they were stimulated sexually.

"Contrary to what people may think, we discovered that women in the study who were paralysed and had no feeling below the breast area were, in fact, capable of having orgasm," Professor Komisaruk said. Those experiments helped

lead to the isolation of the vasoactive intestinal peptide, which he believes is the neurotransmitter, or chemical messenger, in the body that causes the orgasm sensation in the brain. While investigation into the cause of sexual dysfunction is not new, research into developing a specific orgasm pill is "unique," said Kath Penavaria of the Kinsey Institute, a sex research centre in Bloomington, Indiana.

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Business on the Internet... all potential, no performance, right? With a company that's growing at a rate of 3,000% per year, Jeff Bezos couldn't disagree more. He's CEO and founder of Amazon.com, the world's largest and most prosperous on-line bookstore. "The Internet can help you gain or lose a lot of customers very quickly" says Jeff. So he hooked up

with DIGITAL. "It's critical to work with a computer company that has experience

helping people do business on the net," he says. "It's also nice that DIGITAL has the

world's widest range of high

performance servers." To

support its rapid growth, Amazon.com

has upgraded its DIGITAL AlphaServer™ 2000 series to two DIGITAL AlphaServer 8400s, ideal for high growth corporations. "We're using

AlphaServer systems to run our key on-line electronic commerce systems as well as our entire range of back office and

financial applications," Bezos says. The fact is, DIGITAL has lots of ways to help you transform Internet potential into Internet profits...

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THE INDEPENDENT election '97

Major whirls around the country

PM's campaign trail takes in Grand National

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

As a day of election campaigning, even by modern standards, John Major's outing in the Grand National at Aintree must count as one of the maddest on record.

The Prime Minister went on a 1,400-mile round-trip to send a defiant message to the IRA by attending the Grand National after rearranging a day's campaigning in the north-west and the South of England.

It involved a flight to Manchester in a Boeing 737 loaned by British Midland and three flights in a flotilla of helicopters provided by Bristow's.

The day began when the Prime Minister flew to Manchester Airport from RAF Northolt to visit the Fairfield NHS Trust Hospital. Bury, to support two "one-nation" Tory MPs, David Sumberg and Alastair Burt, who are defending key marginal seats.

On the flight to Manchester, two photographers accompanying the election tour organised a £1-a-head sweepstake for the National. Mr Major picked Magoni Beach, a 66-1 outsider. From Bury, Mr Major and his wife, Norma, flew by helicopter to Andover, in Hampshire, around 350 miles, with two helicopters of press members following.

After landing on a football field, Mr Major visited an engineering company producing "overhead powerlines accessories" run by David Hamshaw, a company chosen because he is opposed to the So-

cial Chapter, which Tony Blair would sign.

The Prime Minister had been due to fly on to Kempton racecourse to tour a nearby school but diverted back north. As he climbed into the helicopter, a group of boys playing football chanted "There's only one Tony Blair".

After spending less than an hour on the ground in Hampshire, he set off for Aintree, a trip of a further 350 miles, to see the Grand National, thank the security services for their work over the weekend and to cheer on his horse.

Then it was back in the helicopter to complete his day's engagements in Cheltenham, visiting a local Tesco supermarket and clocking up another 350 miles in his eight hours.

Mr Major's day: 8.30am leaves CCO; 10.00am takes off by 737 from RAF Northolt;



John Major: One of the maddest odysseys yet

11.00am arrives Manchester Airport; battle-bus to Bury; 11.15 leaves hospital; 1.15 leaves Bury by helicopter; 2.30pm arrives Andover; 2.35pm visits factory; 3.02pm leaves factory; 3.23pm leaves Andover; 4.45 arrives Aintree.

The official theme for Day 15 of the campaign was billed on press releases as "British excellence at risk day". But the message the Tory strategists wanted to convey was of a man on the move, John Major as Action Man.

Before we left Smith Square, I spoke to Brian Mawhinney, the party chairman. He was dressed in slacks and a blazer, looking remarkably relaxed, although the polls are refusing to move. Even with three helicopters, the Major campaign has had trouble lifting off. Flashing a smile, which can put fear into enemies, Mr Mawhinney summed up the day by saying: "The medium is the message."

The party leadership wanted to get back on to the attack after being frustrated that Tony Blair's "wobbly weekend" had been pushed off the front pages by Martin Bell standing as an anti-sleaze candidate against Neil Hamilton in Tatton. Mr Major in Bury barely concealed his irritation. He had not, to his knowledge, even met Mr Bell, but BBC sources said he had given the reporter, a veteran of Bosnia, a list in his plane from Split to London and had invited him up front for a chat. Tory sources said the Prime Minister met many people and could not remember them all.



In firing line: Martin Bell, the anti-sleaze candidate in Tatton, answering questions from a baying press pack yesterday. Photograph: David Ross

Bell runs media hacks' gauntlet

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

BBC journalist comes out squeaky clean under probing

Martin Bell had come under fire before; he had been wounded by shrapnel, appearing before the television cameras as a second nature to the man. But there he was, trembling, fingering his forehead when he appeared before the world's media as prospective anti-sleaze candidate for Tatton yesterday.

Before he even entered the grand Sunston Room, in the grand Institute of Civil Engineers at Westminster there were jokes about hacks fiddling their expenses, and what dirt would be dug up about him, who would fling it, and whether he would last the course ahead. As it was, his diffidence was rather disarming. But that did not stop his fellow hacks ripping into him. Whose idea was it, who had paid for the press conference venue; why did he not know what were his policies on tax, education, Europe;

who did he vote for; what skeletons had he got in his cupboard; where did he come from; how much money did he have in the bank?

"This is, even for somebody who is accustomed to scary experiences, extreme," he said. He added later: "I would much rather run upstairs' alley in my armoured vehicle, Miss Peggy, than this. I really would."

He was as honest and as open as he could possibly be in his answers, but the more honest he was, the more the press pressed home the attack. Why would he not identify the person whose idea it was? Why did he not know who had paid for the room? Mr Bell preferred not to divulge the name of the man who had first broached the idea. But pressed by the *Mail*, he said in the end: "Oh, all right, I'll tell you who it was."

It was Tom Stoddart, a photographer whose Bosnian war

photos formed part of an exhibition he had opened at the Royal Festival Hall last Thursday.

The man from the *Mail* could not contain his glee. Beside himself, he said accusingly that Mr Stoddart had nothing to do with the Labour or Liberal Democrat parties. "He's in fact the long-term partner of Kate Hoey."

Ms Hoey is Labour MP for Vauxhall, and Mr Stoddart took the photographs of Tony Blair on the front cover of Labour's manifesto. It had all the makings of a monumental *Mail* conspiracy. All that was missing were skeletons, spies, dead letter boxes, the *Times* crossword and *Astoria*.

But Mr Bell, as obliging as ever, came up with the goods. When I asked whether he would pass the *Sun* test - was there anything in his past that he would not like exposed by the tabloids - Mr Bell said: "I have been examining my cupboard and at the moment I have to say

I find it fairly bare." In all his time at the BBC he had only had his expenses queried once, and that was last November when an illiterate Delhi taxi driver had been unable to give him a receipt for a fare. He was perfectly willing to show anyone his bank statements and his tax returns; no problem.

Mr Bell was also pressed to describe in the greatest detail the route of his journey from the Royal Festival Hall, on Thursday, to the Institute of Civil Engineers.

After he had agreed, in principle, to stand in Tatton, on Saturday, he had been whisked up to the constituency on Sunday for separate meetings with the local Liberal Democrat and Labour parties. "It was like a scene from a bad spy movie," he said. Having met the Liberal Democrats in Wiltshire, he had been taken to a car park and handed over to a man from the

local Labour Party. "We were late," he said, "and I was handed over like a package."

He was then asked by the *Express*: "Given the subject of this press conference, shouldn't you know who's paying for this room?" Mr Bell looked completely nonplussed. "I probably should know who's paying for this room," he said.

The man from the *Times* obligingly shouted out that the room had been paid for by the Labour Party - £375. "I'm perfectly willing to pay £375 here and now," he said. "It's not a problem." And his bank account? "What's in my bank account now? I've just got paid for my paperwork, which I cannot recommend too highly. I got paid about £11,000 a week ago. I spent about £3,000 because my car's running out. Plus what I had in my account: I think I've now got £6,500."

Mr Bell's father was the first compiler of the *Times* crossword; his sister translates *Astoria* books into English.

... but just who is paying the fares?

Colin Brown

The Prime Minister's use of three helicopters for himself and his party, with press, to cover 1,400 miles yesterday raised questions about who is paying for the Conservative Party election campaign.

Bristow's, the company providing the helicopters, including a Sikorsky for the Prime Minister and two Pumas, insist they are not doing it as a donation to the Tory party.

A Conservative spokesman said: "It is not a donation by Bristow's. It is expected that the total cost for the six-week campaign of the helicopter bill will come in at £20,000."

A British Midlands 737 jet which Mr Major used to fly to Manchester yesterday is being provided by British Midland, whose chairman, Sir Michael Bishop, is a party supporter. Sir Michael accompanied John Major on his visit last week to the Scottish Borders and is believed to be a substantial private donor.

Gore Vidal, the American novelist and veteran White House observer, said the Conservative Party's election campaign funds were the biggest mystery of the campaign.

The Tories have reversed a £19m deficit and are expected to spend at least £20m on their campaign. The Tory party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, has laughed off reports that he has a war chest of £40m but it is likely that the total sums raised amount to £40m, including wiping out the debt.

Much of that transformation may be due to anonymous overseas backers who in the past have included such figures as Azil Nadir, the discredited former head of Poly Peck, now a fugitive in northern Cyprus.

Tony Blair, the Labour leader, has promised to ask the Nolan Committee to investigate party funding if Labour is elected, in order to clean out the political stables in Britain.

Mr Major has refused to

match the Labour leader's promise and has attacked Mr Blair for hypocrisy in operating with a blind trust to hide the names of donors to his private office.

Labour will divulge the names of any sponsors donating more than £5,000 to party funds.

In this election, the Tory party is receiving £7,000 per head from newspapers and broadcasting journalists for daily travel costs. But the names of the big backers are unlikely to be declared. They may include Lord Forte, listed at the weekend as the equal 58th-richest man in Britain, with an estimated fortune of £275m after the hostile takeover by Granada for his family-hotel business.

After Baroness Thatcher went to Conservative Central Office to address the troops on Sunday, a black Rolls-Royce drew up and Lord Forte slipped inside barely noticed.

And that is how the donors like it.

Saying goodbye to the grey men

Jack O'Sullivan

Martin Bell MP? The possibility that one of Britain's most admired war correspondents will take Neil Hamilton's seat offers a tantalising glimpse of how politics might be enriched if the parties lost their stranglehold over the Commons.

So who else would perform well in the chamber, who is not, like Richard Branson, already established on the tired list of the great and the good?

As Olga Matland, Giles Brandreth and Glenda Jackson have shown, moving from the media into politics can be easy.

Imagine Mrs Merton's Mancunian tones waiting across the despatch box: "So Chancellor, where's all the money gone? Let's have a heated debate."

Angus Deayton could be Speaker and Danny Baker, the shock jock, could take over as chief heckler from the ageing Dennis Skinner. Meanwhile, the aggressive Jarvis Cocker, (Michael Jackson's chief accuser and lead singer with Pulp) would make a better job of rooting out sleaze than Sir Gordon Downey.

And there would be plenty of votes for the heroes of television fiction, for example the smooth

reassurance of Dr Dangerfield (Nigel Le Vaillant).

But these figures are fantasy characters, played by individuals who in reality are unimpressive. Finding people of Martin Bell's calibre is difficult.

Nevertheless, here are my choices to join Martin Bell at Westminster: Della Smith, trusted by hundreds of thousands of voters, mainly women, for advice on a fundamental part of their lives. She could explain everything in simple steps.

Sheila Kitzinger, author of child care books, would make a good job share.

Richard Dawkins for his incorruptible atheism, vital in this era when politicians like to bear the mantle of priesthood.

Likewise Stephen Hawking, needed for general wisdom about life and the universe.

Lenny Hearty and Dawn French (new Heritage Secretary) to replace the Bottomleys, for their humour, work with Comic Relief and the fact that there are not enough very fat women in Parliament.

Indrajit Singh, editor of the *Sikh Messenger* and regular contributor to Radio Four's *Thought for the Day*, where he always makes more sense than

anything said on *Yesterday in Parliament*.

Stephen Tumin, former Chief Inspector of Prisons, who proved he was prepared to tell the truth about jails, even though honesty cost him his job.

Likewise John Stalker, who investigated allegations of a "shoot-to-kill" policy in Northern Ireland.

Ruud Gullit, manager of Chelsea and one of the most intelligent figures in British sport. He would be easily an equal match for Michael Howard at Home Office questions, provided, of course, he could get himself a British passport.

THE HURRIED VOTER'S GUIDE

THE CAMPAIGN

Yet again the day was dominated by sleaze. Martin Bell, the BBC war correspondent, held a press conference in Tatton to announce his "anti-sleaze" candidature against Neil Hamilton. Mr Hamilton remained defiant, and vowed to fight on in the seat.

Tony Blair went to the City of London to deliver a speech promising a review of government assets with a view to more privatisations. John Major went on a long tour of the country, starting with an NHS Trust in Bury, Lancashire, then on to an engineering firm in Andover, Hampshire, and finally ending up at Aintree for the Grand National.

The Liberal Democrats were concentrating on nursery education, promising that every three- and four-year-old would be offered a place by 2000.

The Paddy Ashdown and John Major battle buses found themselves within hooting distance of each other at Manchester Airport, but an embarrassing road-rage confrontation was averted. The Lib-Dems' vehicle - known as the "Paddy Wagon" - passed by without so much as a single insult being hurled from either bus.

KEY ARGUMENTS

John Major dismissed the threat that Martin Bell poses in Tatton, saying the move showed how little support Labour and the Liberal Democrats had in the Cheshire constituency.

"Everyone in this country has a legitimate right, if nominated, to stand in the general election," the Prime Minister said.

Tony Blair used his City speech, predictably, to attack the Tories for what he called their "mindlessly negative" approach and for their "roller-coaster" economy, gyrating between one extreme and another. He added that there would be no more trade union beer and sandwiches at Number 10 under Labour.

Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, said Labour were "unprincipled scoundrels", making it up as they went along. Later, he added that the campaign had degenerated into a "hysterical soap opera".

Meanwhile, Plaid Cymru launched its manifesto, promising a full-blown Welsh Parliament with law-making powers which would create jobs for 100,000 people.

GOOD DAY



There was only one real winner yesterday, and although he was a Lord, he was not a member of any political party: Lord Gyllene, winner of the Grand National-Lord Gyllene beat the horse backed by Major and Blair (see Bad Day), and Magoni Beach, which Major had also picked in a sweepstake. The two party leaders must have envied the noble Lord as he coasted home to a comfortable victory.

ONE TO REMEMBER

That the outcome of the Neil Hamilton cash-for-questions affair is anyone's guess was well illustrated by the fact that even the bookmakers were split on the favourite to win the Tatton seat. Ladbrokes issued odds on Mr Hamilton to win at 1-5 favourites. They quoted Martin Bell at 3-1 against. William Hill, on the other hand, have Mr Bell as 1-4 favourite, and Mr Hamilton at 5-2 against.

BAD DAY



The Prime Minister appeared on television to say that he was backing the Grand National runner Go Bellicose. Strangely, Tony Blair apparently followed John Major's line on the Grand National issue, and backed the same horse in a sweepstake. Thus cursed, the unfortunate beast did not stand a chance, and failed to complete the course.

HOGWASH



Bill Roach, who plays Ken Barlow in *Coronation Street*, made a statement in support of Neil Hamilton, the former minister who is at the centre of the cash-for-questions scandal. After luncheon at the Hamiltons' home, he held court in the garden. "What has gone through Nick's head is the tenacity, which is most admirable. Nick is standing up for what he believes in," he said.



The BBC war correspondent Martin Bell was in the line of fire yesterday as he fielded questions from colleagues at a press conference. He confirmed he was putting himself forward as an independent anti-corruption candidate to stand against Neil Hamilton, saying he was reacting to the wishes of voters.

John Major dismissed the threat that he poses to the large Conservative majority in Tatton, but Mr Bell countered: "I'm not looking stupid, I'm looking stupid. I know I'm responding here to the wishes of the constituency."

تمكنا من الأصل

Reassurance for the City as Labour leader accepts need to embrace free enterprise system

Economic middle gets Blair blessing

Steve Boggan

Tony Blair espoused the virtues of a mixed economy yesterday, promising an end to "beer and sandwiches" with the unions while promising more support for the dynamism of the market economy. "Labour," he said, "is now the party of business."

In a keynote speech to business people in the City of London, the Labour leader put forward his plan for a "third way" of running the economy, one which lay between state control of industry and the laissez-faire policies of the Tory right.

"Our task is not to return to the past," he said. "It is to equip Britain for the future."

"We accept, and indeed embrace, the new global economy... I accept the need for economic discipline and embrace the role of free enterprise in the economy. There will be no retreat from any of that."

The speech, at the Corn Exchange, was designed to calm City fears of a Labour victory at the general election and to set out Labour's credentials as a party which recognised the value of wealth creation.

Mr Blair flagged Labour's new support for some aspects of privatisation, committing the party to a National Inventory of asset-rich government departments. He promised to borrow only to invest and to match the Government's target of 2.5 per cent inflation or less.

Most of all, he stressed Labour's determination to encourage business, leaving it to flourish where left alone but to be supported by the state where improvements in infrastructure were needed.

"Let me be crystal clear what this partnership entails and what it does not," he said.

"This is no re-hash of 1960s corporatism. There will be no national plans, no grandiose strategies. But there will be an acceptance that business and government have to work together."

"We have no proposals to return to tripartite institutions or beer and sandwiches at Number 10. These are things we are not going to do."

"We have moved beyond reassurance. Our aim now is to build a partnership with business that is broader and deeper than any post-war government has contemplated."

He spoke of the need for flexibility of labour through better training and education, a concept he termed "flexibility plus".

Flexibility, plus policies to ensure economic stability; partnership with business; leadership in Europe; backing for small firms; investment in infrastructure, science and research; and welfare reform and minimum standards in the workplace.

"In addition, we must ensure that the operation of monetary policy is above suspicion of political manipulation," he said.

"To this end, we will create a Monetary Policy Council at the Bank of England... These changes should enable us to achieve much greater macro-economic stability than we managed in the past 20 years, when the UK economy has been by far the most unstable of the major developed economies of the OECD."

The intension, he said, was to end "the plague of short-termism" that had dogged British industry.

On joining a single currency,



No looking back: Tony Blair addressing City business leaders yesterday - "Our task is not to return to the past. It is to equip Britain for the future" Photograph: David Rose

he said: "I have made it clear that we will make our decision on the basis of Britain's national interests."

Options, he said, would be kept open and Britain would join only with the approval of the Cabinet, Parliament and, in a referendum, the British people. Britain, he said, should be influencing the future of the EU from inside, not the fringes.

"The Tories argue that things are fine, that this is as good as it gets," he concluded.

"We argue that Britain deserves better and can do better. Better than 35th in the world skills league. Better than 18th in the world prosperity league. People are not feeling good for a simple reason - there is not enough to feel good about."

Thatcher's children wary of new broom

The man in the orange jacket spoke with the kind of clarity voters have been crying out for, writes Steve Boggan.

"The markets are worried about Labour. They are already depressed at the prospect of Blair getting in and that has been reflected in prices over the past couple of months. If Labour win, we are all expecting a hike in interest rates. There is a lot of fear - the perception of Labour and all the old industries, its links with the unions and so on. The City does not want Labour to win."

As Steve Clark, a financial futures trader at the London International Financial Futures Exchange (Liffe) spoke, two colleagues nodded agreement. Yet, for all his fears about Labour's past, the Winter of Discontent and reminders of 98 per cent supertaxes under old Labour, Mr Clark is not alone.

It is people like him who have to be won over by Tony Blair. They are the backbone of a vibrant financial sector but they experience only of Conservative

rule - a period which has been particularly kind to them. Labour knows this, hence Mr Blair's keynote speech to businesspeople at the Corn Exchange, followed by a tour of the trading floor of the BZW investment bank.

The speech was well received, mainly because most of those present were invited from a 15,000-strong database of entrepreneurs and executives already visited by Mr Blair or Gordon Brown, the shadow chancellor. Among the most important was Sir Peter Hoag, adviser to the board of HSBC Investment Bank, who said business no longer feared Labour. "The market is unpredictable, but looking at the work of analysts, none is predicting any catastrophes or disasters. Quite the contrary, in fact."

Other Labour proponents included Lord Hollick of United News and Media Plc, the film-maker Sir David Puttnam and Lord Paul of the Caparo Group. They ensured Mr Blair

had a smooth ride, as he did at BZW.

But opposite the investment bank's entrance overlooking the Thames is moored the London Regalia floating restaurant and from this, in their garish blazers, other traders looked on, nonplussed. They were not always well-informed, but they were consistent: the City was wary of Labour. "People are not convinced at all by their strategy for business," said Stuart Ward, 30, a gills trader from Essex. "The general feeling is one of uncertainty. People believe that, secretly, they are still hand-in-hand with the unions." His colleague, Tony Sellers, 33, from Kent, said: "I don't believe them on taxes; I don't think many people do. They keep saying 'We can be trusted', but I'm not so sure." Echoing the sentiments of other traders, Mr Sellers put into words the factor that must be visiting Labour strategists' worst nightmares: "What I always say," he offered, "is: Better the Devil you know..."

Slim pickings left after selling the family silver

A favourite joke amongst economists is the one about the economist professor who walks past a £50 note he sees lying in the street. "If it were really there, somebody would have picked it up already," he explains.

So it is with privatisation. If there were a lot of easy sales left, the Government's plans would have pencilled in privatisation receipts of more than £1.5bn next year and £1bn the year after. This is a far cry from the peak of more than £8bn in 1992-93.

Some of the more obvious candidates left for sale would not be big money spinners. The Post Office was expected to go for £1.5bn-£2bn when its sale was discussed last year. But like ParcelForce would bring in less. Channel Four would be a smaller sale. London Underground would raise nothing because of its continuing need for subsidy. In fact the list of obvious tar-

Diane Coyle on the choices for privatisation facing the next government

gets remaining in the public sector prescots slim pickings. The Oil and Pipelines Agency? The Commonwealth Development Corporation? Nirex? The new town Development Corporations? The Conservatives have sold off the family silver apart from the odd salt cellar - raising about £70bn since 1979. A privatising Labour government will have to start thinking about selling the furniture and the ancestral home.

With Gordon Brown's office suggesting that it would be possible to realise "several billion pounds" over the course of a parliament, the options for pri-

vatization must include government land and buildings.

This is a plausible figure. The Treasury is in the middle of a process of auditing everything central government owns as part of the planned switch to "resource accounting" - the introduction of commercial style accounts to the public sector due to start in 1999. The current, less-than-satisfactory estimates in the national accounts put the value of central government-owned tangible assets at £94bn - almost certainly an underestimate, but it does include almost all the roads and bridges in the land.

Selling off a few tangible assets would be less controversial than the other alternatives. Apart from the BBC - and it may yet happen - that boils down to the Housing Action Trusts and National Health Service Trusts. To sell the entire NHS is probably a step further than even new Labour would be prepared to go.

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Mobile man of the Nineties gives Tories Short shrift

And the New Labour machine sets its sights on "Switchers" and "Squeezers"

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

James Goldsmith is sitting on a bench outside the Gravesend branch of Marks and Spencer, chatting cheerily to Clare Short. He is very confident, he says, that Labour will win the election.

Does that mean that the local candidate can count on his support, then? He looks down at his feet. "Er, well I've got a bit of a problem with my address at the moment."

It transpires that Mr Goldsmith - this is James Goldsmith the homeless man from Gravesend, of course - hasn't got one, but he can be contacted via his mobile phone.

Labour's overseas aid spokeswoman hoots with laughter. "You're not of fixed abode and you've got a mobile phone? You are nineties man!"

With or without his vote, Mr Goldsmith is sure the Conservatives' internal battles will finish them off.

"Absolutely," Ms Short agrees. "And we are completely united." There is no obvious irony in her words. She may have been unhappy about the way New Labour was run in the past, but there is not a hint of it today.

Out "on the stump" with Chris Pond, director of the Low Pay Unit and Labour candidate for Gravesend, she is loyal to a 't'.

Gordon Brown's plans for more privatisation? She is all for them.

"We have always believed in a mixed economy. People like me have never said extending the public sector was Socialism," she says, stoutly.

The mood is convivial as the small carnival weaves through the thin Monday morning



Jolly up support: Clare Short makes a phone call back to head office during a visit to the local party workers at Gravesend

Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

crowds, here offering handshakes, there accepting a hug or a kiss on the cheek.

One very plummy lady rushes up to tell Ms Short she thinks she is "absolutely super."

"I've seen you lots of times on the television," she gushes. "I hope you get an absolutely

wonderful job in the government."

Such enthusiasm has to be admired. Already a healthy handful of Labour front-beneers and an equivalent number of Conservatives have glad-handed their way through here, along with a quite stag-

gering number of soap opera characters.

EastEnders stars go down especially well. For Gravesend was the fictional destination of Dot Cotton when she took leave of Albert Square. Michael Cashman caused quite a stir, as did Leonard Fenton, who plays

Dr Legg in the series. And the local police were thrilled to be introduced to Simon Rouse, DCI Meadows in *The Bill*.

There must be Tories in the town - its Conservative MP had a majority of 4,500 at the last election - but few can be found this morning.

Perhaps the New Labour machine is so efficient that it has managed to sweep the opposition off the streets. Even the three "nurses" who began the day wrapped in red tape for a photo-call turn out to be a Labour Party researcher, a full-time party volunteer and some-

one who works for the Low Pay Unit.

Down at the campaign headquarters, they are busy stuffing envelopes: personalised letters with different messages for Tory faithful, waverers and long-term Labour supporters. The talk appears to be in code.

Squeezers, explains Maureen Pitcher, the office manager, are Liberal Democrats who might be persuaded to vote Labour. Switchers are former Tories. "And," she adds solemnly, "I believe the twitches I keep talking about are some kind of bird-watchers."

Ashdown finds himself hoist with own petard

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

Paddy Ashdown was left squirming yesterday after he had attacked the Prime Minister for making personal attacks - of the kind he was alleged to have made himself at the weekend.

Speaking at his daily election press conference, the Liberal Democrat leader spent some time deploring the way in which "spin doctors and political mechanics" appeared to be dominating the campaign.

He said he could never remember a time when the issues - of education, the environment, Europe - had been bigger.

But Mr Ashdown added: "This whole thing is now being hidden under a top dressing of political management, sound bites, spin doctors - and the public are not getting to debate the real issues that matter."

"When the thing degenerates down to the kind of personal insults that the Prime Minister used over the weekend, I get very concerned indeed."

"When the Prime Minister says on, for instance, [the BBC television programme *Breakfast with Frost* (on Sunday)] that he doesn't want to personalise the insults, and then at the same time publishes in the *Daily Mail* a comment like 'the Labour leader is slithering and squirming', I think that demeans the office of Prime Minister."

He continued: "I think it's the kind of campaign which indi-

cates the total panic of the Conservatives."

Mr Ashdown then attacked Labour, as a party, for repeated policy changes - without in any way personalising it in the way the Prime Minister had

done. Labour, he said, had abandoned everything it had believed in, and had performed eight changes on Europe alone, while the Liberal Democrats stood where they had always stood.

"We haven't had to abandon everything we believed in," he said.

Mr Ashdown was then asked to explain the difference between Mr Major's attack on Mr Blair, "slithering and squirm-

ing", and a speech issued in his name at the weekend, in which he supposedly likened Mr Major to a dodgy second-hand car salesman.

Mr Ashdown said: "I did not use the words, 'dodgy second-hand car salesman'. I know that's what people put on the speech that I gave on Saturday. In fact, I said, 'Let's assume that in deciding how to vote at the next election, you were buying a family car'."

"Then I went through the various procedures, the means to express the way that you might go about making a choice. Dodgy second-hand car salesman is not a phrase I recall that I used in that speech at all."

"Let me put it this way. I think there is a great difference between attack and humour in this campaign, and that is the important point."

Earlier, he said: "Two thousand babies are born in Britain each day."

"My message to the parents of those parents born today is that only the Liberal Democrats will make the difference to those children by giving them a real head start in life."

"High-quality early years education is not only the educational foundation stone for every child."

"It is also the first building block in turning Britain into an education superpower."

"We're going to create a school-leavers' class of 2015," he added, "which competes with the best in the world."

Labour cry foul over rivals' tactless tactics

Barrie Clement

The muck and bullets of the hustings arrived at a school gate in Sheffield Hallam yesterday, when Labour and Liberal Democrat activists clashed over "dirty tricks".

While Paddy Ashdown toured Greystones primary and infants school, the party's foot soldiers skirmished with half a dozen Labour representatives who claimed the Liberal Democrats were flouting Queensberry rules to persuade electors to vote tactically.

As children frolicked amiably in the playground, the adults outside engaged in a set-to, in a constituency which the Liberal Democrats are desperate to wrest from the Conservatives.

Labour's ire had been raised by a letter from Richard Allan, the Liberal Democrat candidate, which pointed out that the Labour man had finished a

distant third in the last election "and everyone agrees that he cannot win here."

More infuriating for Labour activists was the claim that they were sending their crack troops to other, more winnable, constituencies, and that Bruce Kent, a former Labour candidate in the area, was urging his party's supporters to vote for Mr Ashdown's party.

Mr Allan's letter, which was sent to voters, went on: "Of course, a few fanatics will still vote Labour here - even if their vote helps re-elect Sir Irving Patrick, the Tory MP! But many Labour supporters say they will be making their vote count on this occasion, to make sure the Liberal Democrats defeat the Tories here."

James Brown, a Labour Party member for 45 years, said he was proud to be a fanatic and that his party was not sending its most energetic activists else-

where. Mr Brown said there was no question of him voting for another party.

"In that case," said Mr Allan, "we could wake up on 2 May and be one of the few mugs left with a Tory MP."

Mr Allan, an ex-computer specialist working for the National Health Service, tried for sympathy: "I gave up my job in February to campaign in this election and now I owe £15,000 to the bank and members of my family. My house has got no central heating."

Mr Ashdown had more important matters on his mind, as he sat down to a lunch of cheese, pie and chips and jam tart with the children.

Despite the main parties' concentration on key constituencies, activists are refusing to lie down. Sheila Bacon, 62, a Labour supporter, said: "If you are going to vote tactically, you should vote Labour."



by Aanonymous

Fatherhood was the first big one and this is the second. I mean, once upon a time you could not imagine what it would be like to be your own dad. And then you were a dad, and had to be patient with the kids and choose their schools and wipe their bottoms. Ready or not, you had arrived.

So now, it seems, this fellow your own age (you might have gone out with the same girls, wet your loins at the same Monty Python sketches, both - arms linked - have shouted "The National Front is a Nazi Front" as the Union Jacks paraded past), this fellow, is going to be Prime Minister. Prime Minister. Will run the country, save it from wars, broker peace deals (the way they do), make speeches at the Mansion House and so on. So it could have been you. And how would you be feeling right now if it was?

That's what I was thinking as I watched the candidate standing in the glass-ceilinged corridor, waiting his cue to enter the large, packed, critical room. I was empathising with him. And he was moving gruffly from foot to foot, in soft jerks, every now and again looking up suddenly and surveying the glass ceiling - as though inspecting it for cracks. He is - I realised - a creature of disguised angularity, his physical fluency diminishing the nearer you get. From far away he sweeps; from close-up he jigs.

Semi-consciously he was making his serious faces. Everyone knows his grin, too lovely, too open, for a cynical age. So he was practising the grimace of determined leadership, furrowing his brow, pursing his lips (or even bending his lower lip over altogether), so pushing his jaw out. Benito Mussolini, I recalled, did this too. But where Mussolini's eyes were cold, these were kind enough - a black, deep line developing in the corner of each, like an Egyptian kohl stroke.

The suit on his long body was, as ever, dark, and the cotton shirt was impossibly white. Shirts, I thought, are only ever that white when you first unwrap them from the plastic, removing the cardboard and pins. So all his white shirts must be virgin; worn for the first time that day. His appearance was immaculate - right down to the one mousy curl, escaping authentically onto his forehead, as if to say "I'm real!" Really, the whole concept was immaculate.

When, after a minute or two, the socialist millionaire with the clipped heard had



finished telling the audience about how Keir Hardie had invented the market, the candidate breathed out, and set off down the aisle. As he walked quickly to the front, television lights picked him up, dusting his hair with white light and flattening out the new lines in his face. What was he thinking (I thought)? That he loved doing this? That he hated doing this? That he would endure doing this because he had to?

His voice, when he began to speak, was still that of a very young man - almost an adolescent's. Thin and high, it hinted at the possibility of a sudden undermining squeak or embarrassing giggle. And he sounded slightly nervous, but was he?

Perhaps he was and he genuinely could not help it. Perhaps he wasn't, but thought it was rather cute - humble - to sound as though he was. And, most likely of all, perhaps he was, thought about faking it, and realised that they all really wanted him to be. No one - least of all the British - likes a smartarse.

"Only connect", said EM Forster. Is that why the candidate peppered his speech, entitled "A Strong Economy" with unscripted conversational you's and I's? "You know", "so the essence, if you like", "I mean", "you see", "I suppose", and - most characteristic, most clearly, most connecting - "I say to you" (always allowing the audience the democratic possibility of "and you say to me").

And he said to us that new forces had been unleashed, new market economics were emerging: the new global economy had to be accepted and - indeed - embraced.

Then he had finished. His aides formed a line to show him first to a side-room, and then it was out and on to the next appointment. I wondered what you might take him to be if you had never seen or heard of him before. A charismatic young surgeon, perhaps, a knighted pediatrician - tough but tender and with strong hands that heal.

In three weeks time his journey will finish. It could end in historic defeat, or else in a night of exhausted celebration - followed by the cold dawn's stabbing revelation that the candidate was no longer the candidate, but was now the Prime Minister. Wanting to find out which, I bought a ticket for the bus.

MEDIA WATCH

Rules which differ for the pundits

Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

While Martin Bell is putting his career in danger by standing as the anti-slave candidate in the Tatton constituency, other media candidates seem to find a shot at politics no hindrance to advancement, given the right ground rules.

The BBC said yesterday that it would review Mr Bell's position when the election is over. Tony Hall, chief executive of BBC News, said: "It is really difficult to use people on screen in the front-line news areas who have publicly declared a political allegiance."

"People from the BBC who choose to stand for Parliament

are obviously aware of how it might affect their future career."

Mr Bell, the *Today* programme reporter Ben Bradshaw, who is running as a Labour candidate in the Tory marginal of Exeter, was put on immediate unpaid leave when he announced his candidacy. Mr Bradshaw attracted claims of bias from the Tories because the BBC did not find him a non-news job quickly enough.

For the long list of newspaper journalists running in the campaign, the rules are not so clear.

The *Daily Telegraph's* assistant editor, Boris Johnson, continued to write for the newspaper's politics pages long after he had secured the candidacy of the

Conservative Party in the Labour fortress of Croydon South.

The *Telegraph* also has Dean Godson, who is running as a Conservative in a media head-to-head against the former BBC broadcaster and sitting MP Austin Mitchell in Grimsby. The paper lost the writer Julie Kirkbride when she was selected as Tory candidate for Bromsgrove.

Mr Johnson denies he has removed from his columns anything that could be a hostage to fortune for his political ambitions: "If people look at my stuff they can see there has been no censorship. If an opponent wanted to go through everything I've written, they would probably find an entire arsenal of

ammunition, if that was their aim."

His editor, Charles Moore, believes there is nothing wrong with a candidate writing about politics as long as the readership knows of the writer's allegiances.

The *Guardian's* editor, Alan Rusbridger, disagrees. "I now wonder if I am reading Boris Johnson as a candidate, or as a pundit," he said. "It is wrong to have him writing leaders and columns while seeking high office in the Tory party."

The *Guardian's* Martin Linton, running for the marginal Tory constituency of Battersea, was taken off of the newspaper's coverage of polls when he announced his candidacy.

At the *Independent* there are two hopefuls. Yvette Cooper is seeking selection as Labour candidate for Pontefract and Castleford and Paul Farrelly is standing as Labour candidate in the Conservatives' third-safest seat, Chesham and Amersham.

Ms Cooper moved from writing leaders to European economics correspondent in keeping with *Independent's* policy of taking candidates off a direct political beat.

There is a long history of candidates from the media entering Parliament, from Tom Driberg, who was a diarist on the *Express* before becoming a Labour MP, to the tragic case of the former BBC reporter Stephen Milligan.

Border manifestos: Nationalists pledge independence, and a care package to shame Westminster

SNP sets out its socialist vision

Stephen Goodwin

An independent Scotland would make England look a mean-spirited place to live for pensioners, schoolchildren and anyone earning less than £26,500 a year if the measures proposed in the Scottish National Party manifesto published yesterday ever came to pass.

There would be 100,000 more jobs; 20,000 new affordable homes; 700 more teachers; higher child benefit; cold-weather payments for the elderly throughout winter; and lower VAT for all on fuel.

Public spending would rise by

the SNP's plans were based on predicting £18bn of revenue "which simply does not exist" while the nationalists countered with Jim Wallace, formerly of the Royal Bank, endorsing the "positive maths" of independence.

Labour's George Robertson said the SNP proposals were a "cruel deception and an insult to the intelligence of the Scottish people".

Charles Kennedy, for the Liberal Democrats, noted the irony of the SNP favouring London Treasury figures over those from Strathclyde, while Michael Forsyth, the Secretary of State for Scotland, ridiculed the nationalist's "Walt Disney politics". "The SNP may be cooking on gas but they simply would not be able to pay the bill," Mr Forsyth said.

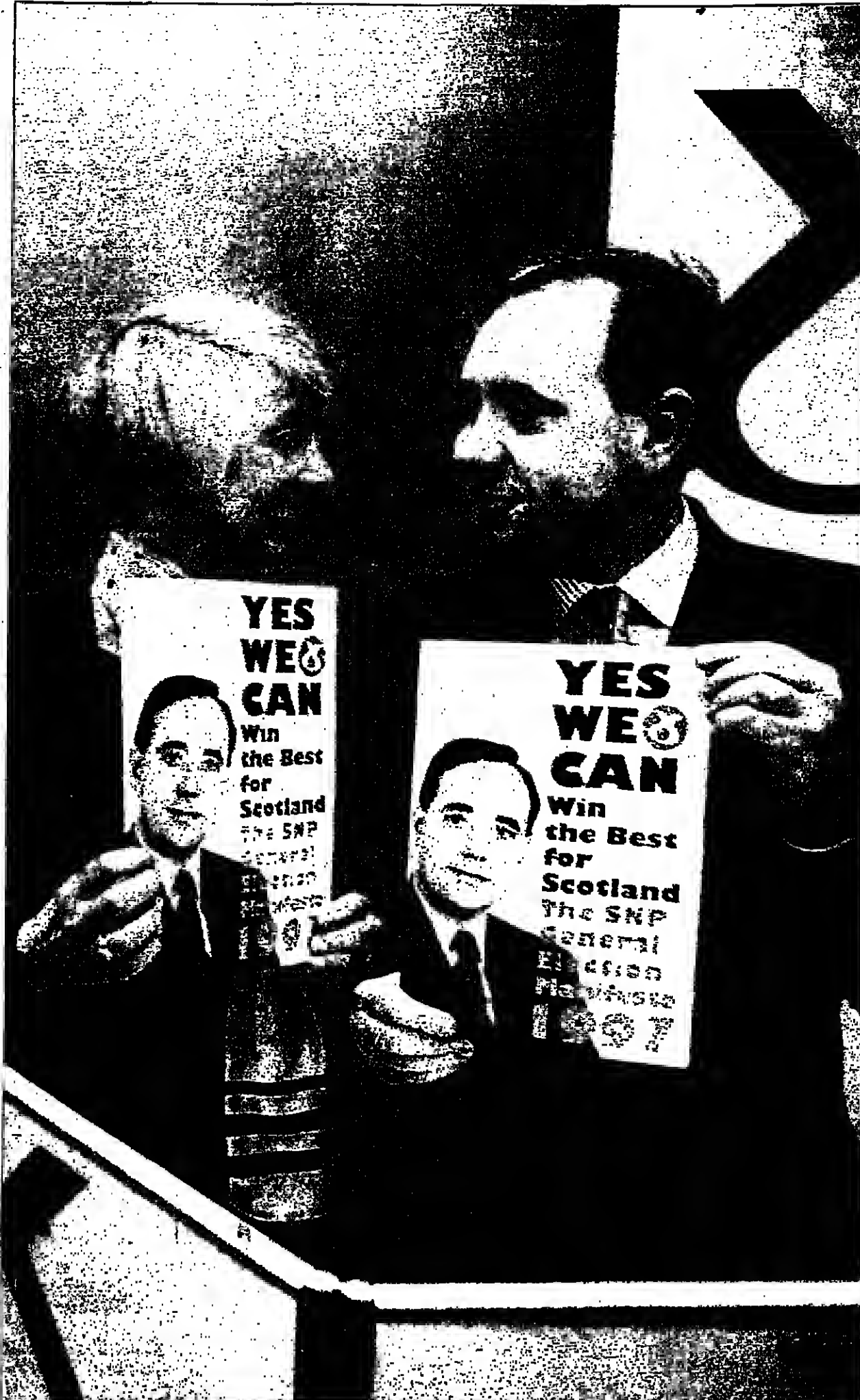
Setting out the most socialist-inclined agenda of any of the main parties, Mr Salmond said the SNP wanted to change the economy and society, balancing enterprise with social concern. But first they had to regain independence.

"We can only achieve these objectives with a sovereign parliament for a sovereign people," said the SNP leader. "We need a powerhouse parliament, not a new Labour parish council which would leave control over economic and social policy firmly in Westminster's hands."

The route to independence is spelt out in the manifesto. After the election of a majority of SNPs, the party would immediately begin negotiations with London. In the last parliament it held four of the 72 seats in the Scottish Parliament.

SNP leaders believe, between "two mature democracies" need only take between 6 and 12 months after which Scots would be asked to approve the "independence settlement" in a simple one question amendment.

While people earning more than £26,500 a year would pay more tax in the SNP's Scotland – largely because of the abolition of the ceiling on National Insurance contributions – the party estimates 85 per cent of male employees and 95 per cent of women would pay less. A "Pensioners' Package" would see the elderly gaining from a £9.20-a-week winter-heating allowance, the scrapping of their standing charges for electricity, gas and telephones, and the



Onward: Alex Salmond, SNP leader, unveiling the party manifesto with MP Margaret Ewing. Photograph: Colin McPherson

abolition of means-testing for residential care. "The fact that people are selling their homes in order to pay for care is the most enormous scandal," Mr Salmond said. Abolishing the test will cost £45m a year.

Defending the new Scotland would be a navy with surface and submarine warships – but no Tri-

dent nuclear missiles – an air force and an army of 9,000 regulars, including commandos and a tank regiment. Traditional Scottish regiments would be restored wherever possible.

An extra £1bn would be spent over four years on restoring Scotland's reputation for "educational excellence". All

three- and four-year-olds would be entitled to free nursery education, and priority would be given to reducing class sizes. Student loans would be replaced by index-linked grants and a further £50m a year spent on youth and adult training.

With 90,000 homes in Scotland deemed to be below tol-

erable standard, the SNP promises to allocate almost a £1bn to housing over four years.

As for a monarch, the Queen and her successors would be "allowed" to remain as Head of State. However, in their absence from Scotland the role would be filled by the Chancellor (Speaker) of the new parliament.

Plaid Cymru reforms put constitution top of agenda

Tony Heath

Plaid Cymru launches its manifesto today with a claim that the constitutional future of Wales is forcing its way to the top of the election agenda.

The 72-page bilingual document demands a Welsh parliament to take over responsibility for policies ranging from health and housing to the environment and education, said at present to be foisted on Wales by Westminster.

Under the slogan "The Best for Wales" a programme of unbridled nationalism lambasts the Tories for ruling by quango. Labour for tailoring its programme to seduce Worcester Woman and Basildon man, and the Liberal Democrats for slipstreaming in Tony Blair's wake.

The unveiling of the manifesto will take place in Cardiff's City Hall, the venue for Labour's proposed Welsh assembly – a body Plaid condemns as a toothless talking shop.

Dafydd Wigley, party president and MP for Caernarfon, said: "We need an elected parliament in order to ensure policies on an all-Wales level which correspond to the needs of Wales, not the needs of London." Law-making and tax-raising powers, similar to those Labour envisages for a Scottish parliament were required to keep Wales' democracy in good health.

Like the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru challenges the historical forger that is the British state. The nationalist point to the principality's growing prosperity as evidence that as part of the European Union, and self-governing, Wales could also expect to undergo an economic transformation.

Several policies open up an attack from the left on Labour. A minimum wage of £4 an hour is proposed. The link between pensions and earnings, severed by the Thatcher government, should be restored. National Health Service trusts and GP fundholding are candidates for abolition. Eye tests, dental checks and prescriptions should all come free of charge.

A ban on tobacco and alcohol advertising is demanded, the latter likely to be unpopular with the SNP because of the Scotch whisky trade.

Legislation to strengthen the Welsh language comes in for special attention. The nationalists want every public body and utility to provide a comprehensive service in Welsh to the public. Firms with more than 50 employees would be required to prepare a language scheme and both Welsh and

English would be designated "official languages".

A tax levied on second homes aims to take the sting out of long-running resentment of owners of property in Wales used only at holiday time.

Arduous though Plaid is to add to its four Westminster MPs the party is playing a loag game hinged on loosening ties with England as a first step to self-government. "It is neither the Crown nor Parliament that holds the inalienable right to govern Wales, but the people of Wales themselves," Mr Wigley said.

The manifesto predicts that Labour's ability to tackle unemployment would be seen as a touchstone of proposals for a Welsh assembly. Plaid Cymru's target is the creation of 100,000 extra jobs. Although private enterprise is identified as the principal engine of job creation,

THE KEY POINTS

- Establish a Welsh parliament with law-making and taxation powers to take over from Westminster.
- Introduce a £4-an-hour minimum wage and create 100,000 new jobs.
- Reform the health service. Abolish GP fundholding and NHS trusts. Scrap charges for prescriptions, eye tests and dental checks.
- Add 2p to the standard rate of income tax to pay for reforms.
- Restore the link between pensions and earnings, severed by the Thatcher government.
- Legislate to promote the Welsh language. English and Welsh to be accorded equal status. Employers with more than 50 staff to produce "language schemes".

gaps would be filled by public-sector initiatives.

"An increase in public spending, financed by a mixture of higher taxes and borrowing is deemed necessary. "Plaid is not afraid to advertise this approach nor to contend that the cost of unemployment should be borne by the whole community and not just by the already victimised unemployed," the manifesto affirms.

The Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales would be replaced by a new National Development Authority with a wide brief and answerable to a Welsh parliament.

The party's reforms would be paid for by an increase of "up to 2p" on the standard rate of income tax and, over time, a reduction in employers' National Insurance contributions which form a tax on employment.

AROUND THE REGIONS

Good candidates make Clwyd West a close call



The Clwyd West constituency is a mainly rural area, the seat of Rod Richards, a former Welsh Office minister, which should have remained strongly Conservative even on its new boundaries. But, although it is 97th on Labour's target list of 109 seats and Labour requires a 9 per cent swing to take it, the opinion polls suggest it could be vulnerable.

Mel Williams, the area representative for the Farmers' Union of Wales, says: "It is going to be difficult to gauge what is going to happen. Opinion polls say there will be a landslide victory for Labour, but I am not convinced. It will depend on how much damage Rod Richards did to himself – he did the honourable thing and resigned, though."

Mr Richards quit last summer after tabloid revelations of an affair with a 28-year-old divorcee, but survived an attempt to deselect him. Before that he was mostly famous for apologising after describing Labour local councillors in Wales as "short, fat, slimy and corrupt".

According to Mr Williams, "Rod Richards has started to talk a lot of sense since his troubles. When he was in the cor-

ridors of power, he seemed to be distant and have a certain 'do as I say' attitude. He seems to have mellowed since."

But farmers play things close to their chests and Rod Richards is up against some damn good candidates," says Mr Williams.

The Tory vote is concentrated around Rhos-on-Sea, where retired businessmen are scared of new Labour taxes. The seat includes the holiday resort of Colwyn Bay.

But up towards the tops of the valleys the farmers are strongly nationalist.

Plaid Cymru, which only won 5 per cent of the vote here in the last election, is engaged in a furious argument with Labour over tactical voting.

Pyllip Hughes, the Welsh actor, started the hornet's nest of the Free Press's letters page when he wrote to attack the "middle-class clientele" of Plaid Cymru, whose support for independence would put at risk "their present standard of living, their good, steady, often well-paid jobs or pensions."

And he warned that a vote for Plaid would let in Mr Richards. A Nationalist "fellow Thespian" responded furiously, ac-

cusing Labour of "abandoning its principles daily."

Carole Thomas, the Labour candidate, is a barrister who, although brought up in Birkenhead, is a fluent Welsh speaker, a strong supporter of devolution, proportional representation and the Welsh language. He is a Flintshire councillor and lives in Mold, just outside the constituency.

The next-door constituency of Vale of Clwyd, which includes Denbigh, is a new Tory seat, one of Labour's top target seats – only 31st on its list. Here Christopher Ruane, a deputy headteacher in Rhyl, in the constituency, needs only a 2.5 per cent swing to win it for Labour. He has been inundating the office with faxes for months now and is a well-known voice locally.

The Tory candidate, David Edwards, got in touch with this office yesterday for the first time, which is probably leaving it a bit late. As the election bandwagon gains pace, the Tories are going to have to step up their fight for the hearts and minds of Clwyd West voters.

Mark Hayhurst
Reporter

Official clock starts running as Parliament is dissolved

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

Parliament is formally dissolved today, starting the official clock running for the election on 1 May.

According to a Commons library research paper: "Dissolution may occur at any time; Parliament does not need to be sitting, nor is it recalled, for the purpose of dissolution."

"It is normally carried out by Royal Proclamation with the Great Seal affixed, and announces not only the dissolution but that orders have been given for writs to be issued for the summons of the new Parliament."

"The writs are dispatched by post from the Clerk of the

Crown in Chancery and are delivered on the following day to the returning Officer for each constituency."

The dissolution will be marked in the City today by a reading of the Royal Proclamation by Colonel Tommy Tucker, the Common Cryer and Sergeant-at-Arms for the City of London, in a ceremony which dates back to 1309.

On Friday, there will be local publication of the notice of election, which is also the first day on which candidates can submit their nomination papers.

Candidates are required to be proposed and seconded by local voters, with eight locally-registered voters assenting. There are 44,203,694 registered voters

in the United Kingdom.

The candidates' election deposit is £500, and to save the deposit a candidate is required to win no less than one twentieth of the total votes cast in a constituency. In 1992, 903 candidates lost their deposits.

For registered voters who are going to be away and unable to vote on 1 May, the key date is Wednesday, 16 April: the last day for receipt of absent voting applications, which can be obtained from local town halls.

The deadline for receipt of those applications used to be Noon, but has now been extended to 5pm. For candidates, nominations close on the same Wednesday – but the deadline is 4pm.

Voters who are unable to vote on 1 May for unforeseen, emergency, health reasons, are able to get absent votes up to 5pm on 23 April.

A combined election will be held on 1 May, for the first time since 1979, with national and local elections coinciding throughout England.

All English county councils are facing election again, along with the reorganised, shadow unitary councils for Blackburn, Blackpool, Bracknell Forest, Halton, Herefordshire, Medway Towns, Newbury, Nottingham, Peterborough, Plymouth, Reading, Southend-on-Sea, The Wrekin, Thurrock, Torbay, Warrington, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham.

Labour MP leaves Hull stranded

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

A Labour MP who has been at war with his constituency party over corruption allegations concerning the local council has decided not to stand again, paving the way for a candidate to be imposed by the national party.

Stuart Randall, the 58-year-old MP for Kingston upon Hull West for the past 14 years, said yesterday that he was standing down "to spend more time with his family". Mr Randall, whose wife, Gillian, worked as his secretary, has three grown-up daughters and a grandson.

Mr Randall's 11th-hour withdrawal will put the spotlight on the Hull party. Mr Randall has also been at odds with John Prescott, Labour's deputy leader, over the running of the local council which Mr Prescott has strongly defended.

Mr Randall said that the lateness of the decision was as a result of "thinking about my future over the Easter weekend". It means that the Hull West and Hessele party, which has been in dispute with the MP for some years, will not be able to choose its own candidate because there is not time to run a ballot among local party members. Indeed,

had Mr Randall announced the decision straight after Easter there would have been time for a local ballot and the delay appears to have been the result of an agreement between the national party and Mr Randall.

The National Executive Committee's by-election panel will meet "later this week" to decide whether to hold a ballot but this is now highly unlikely.

Last year, a local paper, the Hull Daily Mail, ran a front-page story saying that Mr Randall "had accused the city council of being corrupt". Leaked minutes revealed that Mr Randall had told local Labour members that

the council "had a poor local reputation" and was "corrupt". The Labour Party launched an investigation into the allegations over a deal through which a developer, Keepmoat, was given first refusal over all housing development land in the area. Subsequently, the chairman of housing, John Black, accused Mr Randall of not being a suitable person to be an MP and Mr Randall issued a writ for libel against him. A senior local councillor has also been the subject of paedophile allegations and the police have been called in over expenses claims by two councillors.

QUOTES OF THE DAY

"This is, even for somebody who is accustomed to scary experiences, extreme" – Martin Bell

He made a sweeping visit up here and he will go straight back down to cosy Hampstead to do his press conference. He could not even be bothered to stay up here – Christine Hamilton, talking about Martin Bell

It is sad that Mr Martin Bell appears to have allowed himself to be cynically manipulated by the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties' spin doctors – Alan Barnes, chairman of the Tattler Conservative Association

So far we have had a dummy election. The voters have been cast in the role of dummies. We have had no debate on Europe; it should be the fundamental issue of the day – Alan Sked, leader of the UK Independence Party

The calling of the election has probably made people think more deeply about moving to somewhere more attractive – Doug Elkins, of the state of South Australia, explaining why large numbers of people have been inquiring into the possibility of emigrating to Australia

Compiled by Sam Coates

international



Crimson tide: Junior doctors spray red paint on a social security office in Marseille, southern France. They have been striking for five weeks in protest at government austerity measures. Photograph: AFP

Brussels bets on Blair win to seal reform deal

Katherine Butler
Noordwijk

European Union heads of government are planning a special summit on 23 May to put an emerging deal on a new European constitution to Tony Blair, on the assumption that Labour will win the British general election.

Plans for the summit, which is likely to be held in Maastricht, crystallised in the sidelines of an EU foreign ministers' meeting in the Dutch coastal resort of Noordwijk yesterday.

The plans reflect the fact that Britain's partners have given up negotiating with the Conservatives on the future of Europe.

The Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring summed up their cooperation with Britain yesterday. "They are not in a position to demand anything because they are against everything," he said.

Among themselves, the 14 are slowly narrowing down a series of possible trade-offs on wide-ranging reforms to the Maastricht treaty.

They are anxious to pin down Mr Blair at the earliest possible opportunity, in order to salvage stalled treaty-review talks and produce a new pact when they meet in Amsterdam three weeks later.

One diplomatic source said that the Tories, who have been blocking progress on all but the most marginal reform ideas, have been "written off" as serious partners since the election campaign kicked off.

The idea of a special summit with a new Labour Prime Minister - if he wins - is to give him a first-hand account of the nature of the deal which is being put together, the official said.

"Tony Blair will have to be shown the books," he said.

The Labour leader will be asked to address proposals which remain deadlocked after Noordwijk, but on which foreign ministers believe deals can be done over the coming weeks. Labour has already indicated that it would maintain the Conservatives' opposition to the scrapping of national borders and to a future merger between the EU and Europe's defence body, the Western European Union.

Both issues pose difficulties for other member states, so Mr Blair does not risk isolation. He also has a good chance of securing an opt-out from moves to create a passport-free travel zone for EU citizens.

Deals on these issues could be facilitated if, as suggested, Labour withdraws the Government's demands for treaty changes to outlaw fish quota hopping and the use of safety and health provisions to legislate for conditions in the workplace.

EU diplomats believe that on virtually every other issue Labour are willing to negotiate. These include:

- The Social Chapter opt-out. Labour have made it clear they will sign up to the Social Chapter but they will also be asked to agree to a legally binding chapter in the new treaty on employment. The latest Dutch proposals have been rejected out of hand by the Conservatives because they would give the European Commission a role in co-ordinating and initiating measures to tackle job creation. Britain could be ordered to take steps deemed necessary by Brussels to meet annual unemployment targets and would enjoy no right of veto.
- Qualified Majority Voting. Labour are likely to back moves to scrap the national veto in a handful of areas, such as legislation on the environment or

industry, but not on taxation or constitutional questions, which is not being proposed. Mr Blair will, however, strenuously resist proposals to extend majority voting to co-operation on judicial matters, immigration or foreign policy.

- Size and powers of the European Commission. Britain would lose one of its two European Commissioners if proposals to cut the size of the 20 member executive to 15 win acceptance. This would mean that either Sir Leon Brittan or Neil Kinnock, Britain's two commissioners, would lose their seats.

France looks likely to be defeated over its demands for a Commission with a maximum of 10 members, but there is still the possibility of a two-tier structure in which some Commissioners would be given more influence than others. Mr Blair would have to decide whether to sacrifice one British commissioner, and whether to exact a price, in terms of more voting strength for Britain in the Council of Ministers. Labour will have to decide whether to back strengthening the powers of the European Commission president, which is on the cards.

- Votes in the Council of Ministers. A British Labour government could be expected to line up with the other big nations in demanding a fairer re-weighting of votes in the law-making Council. Taking population into account would seriously tilt the balance in favour of the bigger member states but is considered essential by France ahead of EU expansion to the East. The latest indications are that most governments will opt to postpone a decision on the Council votes until enlargement has taken place in the early years of the next millennium.

Essay, page 18

significant shorts

Patten awards British passports to war widows

The Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, laid to rest a dispute over British passports when he threw a tea party for widows of local servicemen who fought for Britain in the Second World War.

The party, at Mr Patten's residence at Government House, was to celebrate the awarding of full British passports, including the right to live in Britain, to 40 widows and wives of servicemen. Reuters - Hong Kong

Chechen 'hero' stands in

Chechnya's President, Aslan Maskhadov, yesterday named a guerrilla commander who is on Russia's most wanted list as acting leader while he is visiting the Middle East.

While many Chechens see Shamil Basayev as a hero for his 1995 hostage-taking raid at a hospital in southern Russia, Moscow considers him a terrorist. AP - Grozny

Hanbo chief admits funding Kim

The founder of South Korea's troubled Hanbo Group, in testimony broadcast from a Seoul jail, told a parliamentary inquiry he had donated money to President Kim Young-sam's election campaign. The collapse of Hanbo's steelmaking flagship in January uncovered corrupt links between the group and politicians in both ruling and opposition parties. Reuters - Seoul

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Fig. 7. Juggling and balancing with difficult objects.

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Zaire regime tumbles towards abyss

Troops desert Mobutu as endgame approaches, reports Mary Braid

The government of corrupt Zairean dictator, President Mobutu Sese Seko, was pushed nearer the abyss yesterday when government soldiers prepared to hand over Lubumbashi, the country's second largest city, to rebels without a fight.

The advance of Laurent Kabila's rebels continues at breakneck speed, helped by the mass defection and desertion of government soldiers.

Only 48 hours after taking Mbuji-Mayi, centre of Zaire's diamond industry, the rebels have surrounded the copper-rich city of Lubumbashi, more than 100km south, and will soon control the mineral-rich southern provinces of Kasai and Shaba.

In Lubumbashi, government troops donned white arm bands to signal their switch to Mr Kabila and danced in the streets with approving citizens. They woke yesterday morning to the surprise news that the rebels had captured the town of Kipushi, just 30km away, on Sunday.

Once again the rebels seem set for a walk-over. Men claiming to be junior officers in the Zairean army called on their troops to lay down their arms and join the rebels.

President Mobutu is being repaid with wholesale disloyalty for a 32-year rule, characterised by repression and personal greed on such a scale that it has impoverished Zaire. Despite the country's huge natural resources the majority of people in Kasai and Shaba, like most Zaireans, have remained dirt poor.

"We've all changed sides," said Sergeant Kafua Otamba at the barracks of the 21st Brigade in Lubumbashi. "We're ready for the arrival of Kabila. We've suffered enough in Zaire. We must get rid of Mobutu."

It was not clear last night if the army had gone over to Kabila entirely.

But like soldiers all over the country, those asked to defend



Rising anger: Students demonstrating against the Mobutu regime near the Arts University campus in Kinshasa yesterday

Photograph: Reuters

Lubumbashi have little to thank Mr Mobutu for. "We've had no pay and we have no food," Sgt Otamba said.

As Lubumbashi looked set for a relatively orderly handover, elsewhere all was chaos. Three days of talks between the rebels and Mr Mobutu's negotiators in South Africa have so far yielded nothing. They began with a stand-off, with the rebels demanding Mr Mobutu stand down and his representatives insisting on an immediate ceasefire. Rebels on a roll are hardly likely to meet that demand, especially when it comes from a tottering regime.

The country's three main political forces — President Mobutu, Mr Kabila and the Prime Minister, Etienne Tshisekedi — are all at odds. Mr Tshisekedi refused to attend the South African peace talks and Mr Kabila has condemned him for accepting the premiership for the third time under Mr Mobutu, and refused the offer of rebel seats in Mr Tshisekedi's new cabinet.

Mr Mobutu, ever the consummate and cunning politician, in approving Mr Tshisekedi's appointment seems to be making a last effort to divide and rule the opposition. He

may be succeeding, for the opposition is in disarray. But if Mr Mobutu is in any doubt that the writing is on the wall he should look at the behaviour of foreign mining companies with current and prospective interests in Zaire. They are already treating Mr Kabila as boss.

De Beers, the company which controls the world's diamond market and has offices in Mbuji-Mayi, held talks with Mr Kabila at the weekend.

In rebel-controlled Kisangani, the new governor said Mr Kabila's authorities were already collecting revenue from diamond sales. "Before, all the

money went straight into pockets," said Yagi Sitolo, referring to the Mobutu years during which Zaire's mineral wealth was used as the personal bank of Mr Mobutu, his relatives and generals.

Last week American Mineral Fields (AMF), the Canadian mining company, opened the first diamond buying office in Kisangani to be licensed by the rebels. "I firmly believe Kabila is going to make a better Zaire, without corruption," said Joseph Martin, an AMF director who admits his company has its sights set on mineral exploration in Shaba province.

Anarchy sweeps capital after marchers beaten

Ed O'Loughlin
Kinshasa

Parts of Kinshasa descended into anarchy yesterday after soldiers used tear gas and armoured cars to disperse thousands of students demonstrating in support of the beleaguered Prime Minister, Etienne Tshisekedi.

"You see what these people are, the Zairean army," complained student Leblanc Mangala, after one desperate charge. "The people are marching for democracy and they fire gas and bullets. They don't shoot at Kabila [Laurent Kabila, the rebel leader]."

In the poor quarter of Makoto, burning barriers were erected and cars hijacked by mobs that often seemed to have little direct political motive for their actions.

Journalists and foreigners were intimidated or even stoned, and there were crowds set about victims and began beating them.

Not to be left behind by civilians or their comrades in the South, Kinshasa's garrison did a little light looting of its own. One American radio journalist had her tape recorder and shoes stolen by soldiers during a charge on the marchers. Another lost his watch.

Yesterday's unrest in Kinshasa stems from the hurried reappointment of the veteran opposition leader, Mr Tshisekedi, as prime minister less than one week ago. Hailed as the one credible figure who could unite Kinshasa's bickering elites and lead them into peace talks with Kabila, Mr Tshisekedi at once outraged Mobutu Sese Seko's immediate family and alienated many within his own by announcing that he intended to dissolve the unelected but well-paid parliament and appoint a cabinet containing no Mobutist ministers. He also proposed to reserve six cabinet seats out of 48 for Mr Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Lib-

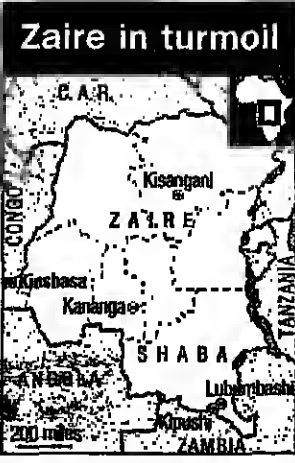
eration of Congo-Zaire, as-offer rejected by the rebels.

At the weekend, angry MPs announced that they would sack their new premier on Monday. Many young Kinshasans did not agree, and managed to keep parliament closed yesterday. Taking refuge in the central Merinzi Hotel, pro-Mobutu parliamentary leader Jean Marie Elisse Bokohoma admitted that MPs had underestimated public hostility. "The street does not agree with the parliament," he said.

Yet Mr Tshisekedi failed to capitalise on his supporters' victory yesterday. A large chanting crowd that gathered outside his home was told first that the leader would address them, then that he was too busy with the meeting. One of his newly appointed "ministers", Christian Badibanga, told the rapidly thinning crowd to prepare instead for a big public demonstration on Wednesday.

For all the tension and violence in Kinshasa yesterday, many foreign observers still doubt that the Zairean people have the will and the unity to topple the dictatorship, which most detest. While some of those marching yesterday were ardent Tshisekedis, "he is a man of peace, Kabila a man of blood", bawled one student clinging to a looted truck — others were just as inclined to hand the crown to Kabila.

Asked what they would do if Marshal Mobutu simply ignored their calls for his resignation, many students were nonplussed. "We are waiting for Kabila," was a common response. But with Mr Kabila's nearest forces hundreds of miles away, Kinshasa seems fated to endure a long, chaotic wait. Across the river in Brazzaville around 2,000 troops from Britain, France, Belgium and the United States are standing by to make sure it is not too violent — for their expatriate nationals at least.



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international

Netanyahu tells US: I'm not for turning

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

The meagre hopes of rescuing the Middle East peace process took a further blow yesterday with a blistering speech here by Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, in which he vowed to press on with his settlement policy, promised no change in the status of Jerusalem, and ruled out any concessions in the face of Palestinian terrorism.

Addressing a pro-Israeli group immediately before his crucial White House meeting with President Clinton, Mr Netanyahu sounded truculent in his determination to press ahead with the Har Homa housing project in mostly Arab east Jerusalem, which has sparked violent daily clashes since Israeli contractors began work last month on the 6,500-house development.

Why not? Mr Netanyahu in effect told the American Israel Public Affairs committee here. "We're allowing contractors to build in Har Homa... that is our right, our obligation." And he mocked Palestinian opposition to the scheme: "This simple act has been described as terrorism of the walk-up rentals, terrorism of the condominiums." His audience roared with laughter.

As for a meaningful gesture from the Israelis to reduce tensions between the two sides, that seems equally improbable.

The Prime Minister noted he had been urged to make concessions "in return for a real crackdown by the Palestinian authority on the terrorist organisation". But this would be "pure and simple surrender to terrorism... we are being told to pay for the privilege of not being killed... we are not going to do that."

Meanwhile the Arab conviction that when push comes to shove the US will always support Israel will only have been hardened by Vice President Al Gore's assertion to the same pressure group that "during this complex period" the Clinton administration would not let Israel down. "I join you here as an ally," Mr Gore proclaimed, to riotous applause.

Not surprisingly the mood was somber in the Oval Office as Mr Clinton and Mr Netanyahu sat down to talk yesterday, with neither man apparently willing or able to make a major move. In remarks to reporters beforehand Mr Clinton spoke only of the need to halt terrorism, breathing not a word about the temporary halt to the new settlement scheme that Washington had been hoping to secure, but which the Israeli Prime Minister seemed to rule out in advance.

Mr Clinton also poured cold water on talk of a second "Camp David" summit, between Mr Netanyahu and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, moderated by the US. It was important not to "jump the gun," Mr Clinton said. "We have to have the right conditions and understanding before we go forward again."

Caught between Mr Netanyahu's intransigence and his reluctance to offend the politically influential US Jewish lobby, Mr Clinton seemed last night to have few options, despite arguments from all sides here that only if the US "knocks heads together" can what remains of the peace process be salvaged.

Instead, Washington yesterday was playing down expectations of real progress from the Clinton/Netanyahu session. The rebuilding of confidence be-

tween the two sides was "a work in progress", Mike McCurry, the White House spokesman, said, noting that a senior Palestinian delegation was already in Washington and would meet the President this week.

If anything, the US reluctance to take a direct intermediary's role is growing, with officials insisting that only Israelis and Palestinians themselves can settle their differences. That casts doubt not only on Israel's notion of a repeat of the 1978 Camp David Summit that led to its peace treaty with Israel but even on an early visit to the Middle East by the new Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright.



No compromise: Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the Voices United for Israel breakfast in Washington.

Photograph: Ron Edmonds/AP

Algerians braced for new wave of terror

Algerians are facing 58 very bloody days. They know the statistics all too well because - exactly two months before last year's constitutional referendum - the country's armed Islamists went on an orgy of killing in the villages outside Algiers. Now, two months before the parliamentary elections - in which the largest opposition party, the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), cannot run - the slaughter has begun again.

Last week, the FIS, which was declared illegal after its success in 1991 elections, urged voters to boycott the polling booths on 5 June. And that, as one Algerian journalist commented coldly, convinced many that blood would soon run again.

They were right. As the death toll in the latest and most obscene of Algeria's civil war bloodbaths climbed to 84 after the mass killings south of Algiers, there is a mood of chilling indifference in the streets of the capital. The daily newspapers are not short of details: at least 15 men, women and children decapitated in the village of Amroussa, some with chainsaws; another 52, including more women and children, left with their throats cut or doused in petrol and left to burn to death, in Thalit; more dead in Harbil, Bouira and Sidi Naamane. In Algiers, however, the talk is all about the "100 terrorists" killed by security forces in the great mountain battles outside Tizi Ouzou.

It is a mirage unlikely to last. How many times has the government told the people that the "war against terrorism" is almost won, that the last "terrorists" - official nomenclature for members of the Islamic Armed Group (GIA) - are putting up a last effort before liquidation?

Many of those killed in the weekend slaughters were relatives of the so-called self-defence units which the government has armed in the countryside to fight the guerrillas. Yet again, therefore, their wives and children and parents are paying the price for their allegiance to the "pouvoir".

According to some reports,

Islamist rebels raise stakes in fight to topple government.
Robert Fisk reports

the Islamists staged a false attack to draw pro-government militiamen out of their villages - leaving their loved ones at the mercy of the killers. Only one local Algerian reporter, from the daily *Liberté*, reached the site of a massacre - at Amroussa - where survivors told him that Antar Zouabri, who took over the leadership of the GIA when Jamal Zitouni was killed last July, personally led the attack. True, the army and air force are continuing their campaign against the guerrillas in the Kabylie mountains; hence the stories of "100 terrorists" killed. But despite the use of armour and helicopter gunships, the military has apparently still not been able to penetrate all of the densely forested gorges of the mountains where the GIA has defended itself with mines and booby-traps. And the FIS is still claiming that the GIA has been infiltrated by the government and that the dreadful deeds done in the name of Islam are in part perpetrated by the authorities in an attempt to turn the people against the guerrillas.

This explanation fails to address the fact that each new atrocity saps government credibility - why would Algeria's military intelligence service wish to destroy the claim by its own generals that they can crush "terrorism"? But it also remains a fact that remarkably few Algerian reporters have been able to visit the scenes of such horror to investigate the incidents. No journalist, it seems, has reached Thalit, Harbil or Sidi Naamane. Thalit, indeed, is barely a village, a mere collection of semi-dilapidated houses in the countryside that now have - if the figures are to be believed - scarcely a single surviving inhabitant.



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Danes court China's fury and shame the EU by speaking out on rights

Teresa Poole
Peking
Tony Barber
London

The wrath of China found a new target yesterday when Denmark decided to press ahead with a United Nations motion in Geneva later this week, con-

demning Peking's human rights record. "We still hope Denmark will think twice and will think seriously about the consequences of such action," said the Foreign Ministry spokesman, Shen Guofang.

"If it persists, I can say that relations between China and Denmark will be seriously

damaged in either the political or the economic and trade areas ... If Denmark really insists on doing this, it will end up as the biggest loser."

Denmark stepped into the breach at the weekend after France effectively vetoed a joint European Union motion censuring Peking at the UN Human

Rights Commission in Geneva. The Danes showed no sign yesterday of buckling under pressure. "We have made our decision," said Niels Helveg Petersen, the Danish Foreign Minister.

Not for the first time, the EU's failure to adopt a united stance has raised doubts about

the 15-nation bloc's ability to pursue a common foreign policy, while exposing differences between the EU's bigger and smaller states. To the dismay of those who want the EU to speak coherently, and with one voice to the world, a clear rift has now opened up among the member states on how best to

address China's human rights record. France was primarily responsible for killing off the joint EU initiative. But Germany, Italy and Spain expressed sympathy with the French view that dialogue is better than confrontation. "It is more important to achieve specific

progress than to agree on resolutions which have no success," said Germany's Foreign Minister, Klaus Kinkel.

However, the Dutch Foreign Minister, Hans van Mierlo, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, said the EU would be guilty of double standards if it took a soft line towards China but was tough on smaller countries which were less important in commercial terms. "This is not compatible with the universality of human rights," he said.

Every year since 1990, China has garnered the support of enough Asian neighbours and developing countries to block the annual attempt by the EU and the US to censure its record. Irrespective of the change in position of up to four European countries, this year's motion would have had little chance of passing.

But the Geneva meeting is seen by Peking as an annual public torment, and China has lobbied furiously behind the scenes to thwart the move. The fact that the EU no longer has a consensus on the motion will have delighted the Chinese government and dismayed the United States, which yesterday praised Denmark for sticking to its principles.

Over the past year, China has become more sophisticated in the way it argues its case on human rights, though without offering any actual concessions. By stressing the opportunity for dialogue, and highlighting

recent amendments to its criminal and civil laws, it has managed to blunt the impact of the harsh jail sentences it gives dissidents and the absolute restriction on independent political thought in China.

Peking's willingness to threaten countries, such as Denmark, with economic repercussions has proved divisive.

President Jacques Chirac is due in Peking in May, and France is hopeful of finalising various business contracts during the state visit.

In a sign that China is pleased with France, the French Defence Minister, Charles Millon, received a warm reception in Peking yesterday from the Prime Minister, Li Peng. Chinese television quoted Mr Li praising France for refusing to co-sponsor the UN resolution.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry yesterday laid out a panel of three Chinese human rights scholars to brief the foreign media on what they portrayed as big improvements in human rights in China since the economic reforms started in 1979. While it is probably true that Chinese people enjoy more freedom now than at any time since 1949, the persuasiveness of the argument is limited.

Few Western specialists accept China's insistence that it has no political prisoners, that dissidents such as Wang Dan and Wei Jingsheng are "common criminals" and that there is no censorship of the media in China.



Conveniently forgotten: Since the tanks crushed the protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, the big powers have turned a blind eye to China's rights violations Photograph: AP



Albania force cracks Italian PM's coalition

Andrew Gumbel
Rome

In the bad old days of revolving-door coalitions and policy decisions steeped in corruption, it used to be said that Italy did not have a foreign policy. Finally, this most unlikely of regional powers has found an international role — as head of the multinational peace-keeping force being sent into Albania — but the enterprise is being undermined by that old Italian bugbear, political instability.

Yesterday, after a weekend of futile arm-twisting and back-room haggling, the small but feisty far-left party Rifondazione Comunista confirmed that it would vote against the intervention force in parliament. The decision is not a catastrophe, because Rifondazione is not a part of the centre-left governing coalition and its votes alone are not enough to scupper the operation.

But it is still bad news for Romano Prodi, the Prime Minister, who normally relies on Rifondazione to make up his majority in the Chamber of Deputies and was looking for the broadest possible cross-party support to send Italy's 2,000-odd peace-keeping troops confidently on their way.

Instead of a foreign policy triumph, Mr Prodi is faced with a dangerous crack in the architecture of his government. In-

stead of concentrating on the mission itself, he will have to resort to some low political tricks to ensure it gets off the ground at all. "Of course I'm fed up with this," Mr Prodi confided in a newspaper interview. "But the interests of the country come ahead of my personal feelings."

The root of the problem lies with the cards Mr Prodi was dealt in last April's general elections. Although his Olive Tree coalition was handed a clear majority in the Senate, it fell just short of 50 per cent in the lower house and so was forced to recruit Rifondazione as a peripheral coalition partner.

Unluckily for Mr Prodi, Rifondazione's leader, Fausto Bertinotti, is an adept master of the art of political brinkmanship — always pushing for that last little concession and forever threatening to withdraw his support if he does not get it.

That explains why Italy's swingeing budget cuts, aimed at qualifying the country for European monetary union on time, have not touched the welfare state, falling back instead on accounting tricks. That largely explains, too, why Mr Prodi and his ministers have often looked so weak — they never know when Mr Bertinotti is going to jump on them next.

The Albanian mission is safe because it has the support of most of the opposition, which may abstain in parliament but certainly won't vote against. But Mr Prodi's government looks less secure, what with various centrist groups clamouring for a rethink of the coalition and the main left-wing party, the PDS, threatening to dissolve parliament if a clear governing majority cannot quickly be reestablished.

The irony is that all this has been sparked by a desire to bolster political stability, albeit in a neighbouring country. Asking Italy to bolster the stability of anything can never be a particularly good idea; but with Mr Bertinotti loving the power of his pivotal position, it looks an impossibility.



Prodi: 'Interests of country come before my feelings'

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Why Mr Hamilton should stand and fight

It would be in the interests of democracy for the Tattler Conservative Association to vote tonight to adopt Neil Hamilton as its candidate in the election. Then the people can decide the "sleaze" issue. Is Mr Hamilton guilty of no more than minor "misjudgements", as he insists, or has he, like Tim Smith, put himself beyond the ethical standards expected of our representatives?

In all probability, judged on that basis, the voters of the formerly safe Tory Cheshire constituency will turf Mr Hamilton out. Not only would that outcome give most of the rest of the country great satisfaction; it would also result in the election of an extraordinary MP. Martin Bell, the white knight who charged for the cause of a moral foreign policy in Bosnia, would sit as an independent member (a touchingly old-fashioned concept, but no worse for that) with a mandate to raise ethical standards in public life.

Mr Bell's decision to stand is to be applauded unreservedly. There are only two conceivable objections to this choice of an anti-sleaze candidate. One is that he is a journalist, a member of the only profession that is about as loathed and distrusted as politicians. But he is a foreign correspondent, which most consumers of the public prints seem to think is something quite different, either from

the doorstepping tabloid hacks or the ratpacking Westminster lobby. So, though not perfect, Mr Bell is more acceptable than most journalists would be.

The other objection is that Mr Bell is guilty of inflating his own ego. The answer to that is that anyone who wants to be an MP must be touched by some measure of egotism. The issue is the degree of derangement, and whether it is a madness that serves the general good. On those tests Mr Bell, a crusading member of life's awkward squad, more than passes muster.

It is not only that Mr Bell is the right man: the whole crazy venture is very much to be welcomed. When Jon Kelly, the Labour candidate, first announced his willingness to stand down in favour of a cross-party candidate, the Conservatives dismissed it as a "gimmick". Indeed, it seemed like a good idea dreamt up by Tony Blair's adept and professional PR team, which would keep the spotlight on the sleaze issue for another few days. Now that a credible cross-party candidate has emerged, it is obvious that there is more to it than a mere media stunt. The historic resonances of an independent candidate standing with joint Labour and Liberal Democrat support are too strong to dismiss as a gimmick. It was significant that the two parties chose to field



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Peter Mandelson and Lord Holme to speak for Mr Bell on television on Sunday night: they represent their parties' coalitionist wings.

And as a ploy, this one has worked. It has embarrassed the Prime Minister excruciatingly. Yesterday it was possible almost to feel sorry for him as he insisted yet again that Mr Hamilton was a matter for the Tattler Conservative Association. And Mr Bell? Well, Mr Bell was a matter for Mr Bell. If Mr Major had been asked about education policy, no doubt that would have been a matter for Tattler Conservative Association, too.

It is less easy to feel sorry for Mr Hamilton, but he has been made to look a fool. Not satisfied with speaking only through his wife, Christine, he yesterday chose to embarrass himself further by speaking through Bill Roache, the *Coronation Street* actor.

The spectacle is becoming so bizarre that there is a danger of losing sight of the central issue. It is this: Mr Hamilton is accused of accepting cash to ask questions, an accusation he denies. He must be presumed innocent until he is proved guilty – but John Major must be presumed guilty of deliberately postponing Sir

Gordon Downey's quasi-judicial process, which could have decided the issue before the election. Nevertheless, Mr Hamilton has admitted tax evasion and failing to register financial interests, including free stays at the Paris Ritz. On these grounds alone, Mr Major should have refused to endorse him as the Tory candidate.

The Labour-Liberal Democrat ploy has also worked in another sense. Yesterday the polling company ICM, which had carried out a poll in Tattler last week, re-interviewed nearly 300 voters to ask them how they would vote now that the identity of the anti-sleaze candidate was known. It indicated that an overwhelming majority would vote for Mr Bell. The ICM poll also suggested that if Mr Hamilton stood down, the Tories would hold the seat easily.

Unfortunately, this ought to be enough to ensure that the Tattler association dumps him tonight; but local associations are not always wise in their judgements.

The Conservatives, especially those trying to persuade Mr Hamilton to go, argue that sleaze is a distraction from the "real" issues. They are wrong. Sleaze is a real issue. It matters a great deal to the health of our democracy. It may prove to be a fair summary of 18 years of Tory rule that, in the end, the Conservative lost partly because they could not get any

other argument across, they were so distracted by sleaze.

If people do not trust their politicians, then democracy will be eaten away by cynicism. So join us in an appeal to the Tattler Tories. Keep Mr Hamilton. Make him stay and fight. Let us have a full debate in this election campaign about standards in public life. And may the worst man lose.

Let them eat cheddar

For too long the French have been deprived of one of civilisation's finer points, namely mature cheddar. Roquefort, hrie and vacharin are all fine in their way (and it is not only children who get addicted to La Vache qui Rit) but they remain... soft. As part of a promotional effort on behalf of British food, the French are being invited to try something different. This is surely what free trade in Europe ought to be about – the expansion of choice and the refinement of taste. Political philosophers can ponder that old dictum of de Gaulle's about the impossibility of governing a country with 300 different cheeses. What form of governance should suit a country where the consumption of sage Derby starts to match that of Pont L'Évêque?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Country needs change – and so do Tories

Sir: Some months ago I ventured, as a former parliamentary colleague of the Prime Minister, to tell him that in my view a clear majority of the electorate had decided that for a variety of reasons it was "time for a change". In the 1997 general election I could not and would not actively support the Conservative Party, as I have consistently done for over half a century.

It is now time to stress that we British preach – and claim to practise – a fully pluralistic form of parliamentary democracy; and hence should recognise that pluralism does not merely mean that one party recognises the existence of others. It also entails an acceptance of the historic concept that, from time to time, one or other can reasonably expect to take over the reins of office, as has happened during the last century. This consideration has become blurred since 1945, because the only other party, at least under our present electoral system, capable of forming a government, was an avowedly Marxist-Socialist one, socially divisive and dedicated to creating a class-warfare society with aims incompatible with, and erosive of, our nation's historic respect for individual freedoms.

Now this has all changed. Whatever Mr Blair may be charged with, he is not a Marxist and does not lead a Marxist party.

The present performance of our national economy may well now be on the right road. Yet it is pertinent to recall that, as Kenneth Clarke has very recently admitted, what we have had to endure in the interim has not been due just to a world recession, but arises from wrong policies the Tories pursued in the late Eighties, culminating in Black Wednesday in 1992, involving us in the largest ever single debasement of our currency. "New Labour" may well be divided on national constitutional issues, and about our future relationship with Europe. But there is a general national consensus that centralising trends have to be reversed in favour of more devolution: arguments are only how best to achieve this.

As regards Europe, it is within the Conservative Party the deepest fissures exist. Mr Major continues to stress that Britain has to be "at the heart of Europe". So far he seems to interpret that role as a readiness to inflict a series of cardiac arrests within the EU, using a veto whenever he feels so inclined, to maintain a façade of unity within the party.

No one in their senses wants a change of government just for the sake of change. Yet certainly the Tory party as now constituted and directed needs, in its own best interests as well as those of the nation, to have the opportunity to undertake severe heart-searching in order to regain a new identity and unity of purpose, before it can hope to take office again.

Sir FREDERIC BENNETT
Abertaweili, Gwynedd
The writer was a Conservative MP 1951-1987



something un-British and continental, for that is the logical end if proportional representation is realised? What makes them devalue their country's history and institutions so?

Transforming the House of Lords into a state-appointed quango, paving the way for the probable break-up of the United Kingdom, extending majority voting in Europe is potentially catastrophic for the unity and stability of the country. Potential Conservative defectors should stop, think and put and end to these dangers.

RUSSELL A. CLARKE
Nottingham

Sir: As a first-time general election voter, I read with interest Michael Streeter's article on the "Big Mac generation" (1 April). While there is clearly disillusionment among young people, I would dispute his claim that the Conservatives will be the beneficiaries.

Like most first-time voters, I can't remember much about the last Labour government, but the effects of 18 years of Tory rule are all too apparent. In employment, education, training and wider issues like crime, and democracy the Conservatives' record speaks for itself – an endless list of wasted potential. Young people are the future, but many feel they have no future. The Tories have repeatedly failed young people and should never be trusted again.

A Labour government will make a real difference to young people's lives – by introducing a national minimum wage to end poverty pay, by getting 250,000 under-25s off benefit and into work and by changing the way our country is governed.

CARA PEATTIE
Grangemouth, Central Scotland

How footpaths fell to the plough

Sir: Christopher Padley (letter, 3 April) is too kind to highway-disturbing landowners in his statement of the law on the ploughing of bridleways. Cross-field footpaths are similarly "protected" and, in the case of any subsequent disturbance, routes must be restored within 24 hours, not 14 days.

How it came about that historic highways could be destroyed, ecosystems extinguished and country walks and rides ruined in this manner is an interesting study of history and politics. Up to the Second World War it was an offence to plough any highway (footpath, bridleway, vehicular road etc) unless the landowner could show that a "customary" right to plough existed – normally very difficult. This protection was eroded during the war when regulations empowered the Ministry of Agriculture to authorise the ploughing of highways.

After the war the Hobbouse Committee (1947) recommended that this practice continue – ploughing forbidden unless authorisation obtained. However in keeping with the then-prevailing agricultural encouragement policies this recommendation was ignored. The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in effect legitimised the ploughing of cross-field bridleways and footpaths by permitting it in the interests of "good husbandry".

The Rights of Way Act 1990 reversed this presumption in favour of disturbance by permitting cross-field footpaths and bridleways to be disturbed only where it is "not reasonably convenient to avoid disturbing the surface". Even then the line of the highway must be defined and the surface made good for walking, riding or cycling on within 14 days of the first disturbance in any agricultural cycle and within 24 hours of each subsequent disturbance.

Unfortunately the vast majority of landowners simply carried on as before, obliterating cross-field routes regardless of whether they could avoid them and then failing to comply with the restoration requirements. How many local authorities fulfil their statutory duty to consider whether or not it is "reasonably convenient to avoid disturbing the surface"? None in my experience. Assertive action in this respect would transform the countryside.

NICK JEFFREY
Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire

Good science is no mere 'ology'

Sir: In her scattergun attack on "ologies" (4 April), Suzanne Moore lumps mysticism together with science. She confounds the use of the scientific method to answer trivial questions with its use to answer important ones. She regards regulation and information

provision as the same approach to risk-control, when they are policy alternatives. She includes psychologists among the experts she accuses of ignoring the unconscious when, in fact, they are the ones who study its contribution to our behaviour. Good journalism, like good science, requires discrimination: we need less of some "ologies" (graphology, astrology) but more of others (good psychology, good neurology).

The study showing effects of environmental stimulation on brain and behaviour is good behavioural neuroscience demeaned by a whimsically misleading reference to the animals in the more stimulating environment as "middle-class". Sometimes attempts to render good science palatable for public consumption result in its appearing as trivial as bad science. This makes judgement of the true quality and relevance of the work harder for the lay person. Nevertheless, journalists should be competent in such judgements.

NIGEL HARVEY
Reader in Experimental Psychology University College London

Glimmer of hope in shop doorway

Sir: By offering homeless city-dwellers the chance to register on the electoral roll, with "shop doorway" as their address (report, 5 April), city councils may have solved the "benefit trap" faced by many of Britain's cardboard-city inhabitants.

The problem of homelessness leading to inability to claim benefit with which to pay rent on a property, without whose address it is not possible to claim the benefit, is well known. If "shop doorway" is sufficient for enfranchisement, then it ought to be sufficient to provide the crucial step away from homelessness.

PHIL MANFIELD
London WC1

Call a truce in the sleaze war

Sir: Martin Bell's decision to stand at Tattler ("Martin Bell to take the flak in sleaze war against Hamilton", 7 April) is understandable but still flies in the face of the principle of natural justice that a person is innocent until proven guilty.

The best way forward would be for Mr Hamilton to agree to stand aside with both the Liberal Democrats and Labour, and let Martin Bell hold the seat in good faith pending the publication of the "sleaze" report. Then the seat could be contested by all parties fairly and squarely.

JONATHAN YOUNES
Sidcup, Kent

Liverpool thanks Aintree crowd

Sir: On behalf of the people of the City of Liverpool I would like to thank all the many thousands of visitors who displayed such tolerance and forbearance during the exceptional events at Aintree this weekend.

We were pleased to be able to help with accommodation but could not have achieved so much without assistance from a host of other organisations, agencies and above all, the many residents who so generously – and typically – opened their own doors to help.

I hope all those who travelled to Merseyside for the Grand National will not be put off returning and look forward to seeing them here again next year under happier circumstances.

FRANK PRENDERGAST
Leader Liverpool City Council Liverpool

We can help the people of Iraq

Sir: Felicity Arbuthnot (letter, 1 April) paints a bleak picture of life and death in Iraq, where UN sanctions remain firmly in place. She details the awful price being paid by innocent people and we share her frustration and anger.

The situation is bleak, but there are people trying to do something about it. Last week Care International was able to deliver water pumps to Najaf and Kufa. These two cities, both in southern Iraq, will now have their shattered water supplies rebuilt and will receive clean water for the first time in over six years.

Public health has deteriorated markedly and Care has been obliged to supply emergency food to hospital patients and expectant mothers alike, in an attempt to provide a nourishing diet to the most vulnerable. Both programmes were funded by the British government's Overseas Development Administration. We would obviously prefer to be working with the people of Iraq to build a secure long-term future, but as long as sanctions are being used as such a crude weapon against an innocent population, the least we can do is help them survive.

WILL DAY
Chief Executive Care International UK London WC2

Survival of the fittest words

Sir: I imagine many of your readers sympathise with P R Millett (letter, 4 April) in his irritation at such phrases as "zero tolerance".

However, English is a living means of expression, and the principle of evolution will apply: life tries every variation; if a variation can survive, it will. Most of our present-day verbal variations will die out; those few which are useful will survive.

P R Millett must be grateful that he displays a characteristic of living things – sensitivity to stimulus – and that he is not a couch-potato.

JOHN RIVETT
Beaminster Dorset

Sir: Hurray for P R Millett. Let us also do away with "prior to" and "in excess of" and get back to "before" and "more than".

DAVID IMASSON
Leeds



commonest word in jazz parlance for "improvise" but is not "improvise" but "impro" have never heard the word "improv" or "impro" used by a jazz artist.

But there is Tim Burton saying that some of his scenes are improv'd and I say that. The reason you should not use the word is that you cannot write it down. You could write that "some of the scenes are improv'd", but you should not, because that means something else, namely, that some of the scenes are made better. And to improv is not necessarily to improve.

So how do you write the past tense of this peculiar new verb to "improv"? Do you inaccurately write

improv'd?, as I have tried? Do you write "improved"? Do you ban the use of the word "improv" as a verb at all, just to avoid problems like that?

Or do you just say:

"firsggo bdnsk kkkko
hpingo oooov
dofootnossf8Rgigil
- - -
d <y> <y> <y> <y>
<y> <y> <y> <y> <y>
Sorr. Sph. & R. at work"

تمكنا من الأصل

Death at Heaven's Gate can shake your faith in God

The mass suicide in San Diego 10 days ago of 38 members of a cult known as Heaven's Gate was a disturbing event. What are the conditions in which cults proliferate?

Looking at the United States, one finds the most striking aspect is that the country has developed a remarkable diversity of faiths. While 19 out of 20 Americans believe in God, a higher proportion than in western Europe, they practise their faith through more than 2,000 different religions. In the area of New Mexico where the Heaven's Gate cult was based, before moving to California last October, there was also a Hindu retreat, a centre for Russian mysticism, a surrealist enclave, a Sufi Foundation for those who practise Islamic mysticism, and New Age encampments for what locals call "burned-out people".

The reasons for this riotous growth in religions are clear enough. Unlike European countries, the United States was founded on principles that specifically excluded the notion of a state religion. In American history there has been no national church and thus nothing comparable to the Church of England, or to the position of the Catholic church in France before 1789 and in Italy and Spain until recent times.

Immigrants into the United States brought their varying religious traditions along with their baggage. Indeed, some made the journey precisely to escape persecution in their native lands. As a result, a religious marketplace has developed in which all the world's major faiths compete for members with each other and with minority beliefs. There is choice. When Europeans lose their faith, often nothing fills the void. Americans seem to shop around. In these circumstances, cults, however strange, can flourish. Anything goes. About 100 of America's religions have an interest in flying saucers. Members of the Heaven's Gate group believed that tucked in behind the Hale-Bopp comet now streaking across the sky was a spacecraft that would take them to the "level above human".

In this way the US already fulfils the Vatican's most dire forecasts. In a new analysis, Cardinal Ratzinger, who is responsible for faith and doctrine, says that we have entered an age of relativism. Whatever is proposed as a universal truth or a norm of general application is, he argues, viewed as dogmatic, authoritarian and contrary to two criteria claimed as infallible – tolerance and pluralism. Such a development weakens the message of Christianity, which is, by definition, universal.

If the Catholic Church, with its doctrines and sacraments, has only a relative value, the Cardinal asks, is not Christianity reduced to a type of humanism? On this reading, Jesus Christ becomes merely a religious genius among others, a view reinforced by the contemporary interest in the Jesus of history (of which AN Wilson's recent books on Jesus and on St Paul are a current example). In these circumstances, notes the Cardinal, to announce one's faith in the divinity of a single man becomes almost a sign of "fundamentalism" or of "fanaticism". Cardinal Ratzinger concludes by reflecting on Christianity's "fantastic loss of direction", which is demonstrated by the pro-



Andreas Whittam Smith

The age of relativism is deeply unsettling for those of us in the Church of England, or in the Roman Catholic Church

liferation of different blends of Christian belief in Latin America, Africa and Asia, by the decline in regular attendance in the West, by the sheer gap between the Church's teaching and today's morality, and by the growing claim among the faithful for autonomy of conscience and behaviour.

In describing the age of relativism, the Cardinal is surely right. The United States is showing us the future so far as religious belief is concerned. Immigrant communities in western Europe have also brought their religions with them and, so to speak, have opened up the market. Buddhism has a growing appeal. Surveys show that young people are sceptical of traditional Christian teaching. Charismatic, or "happy clappy" versions of established religions are relatively successful. There is also a growing interest in astrology.

In this light, fundamentalism is a defence against plurality. Indeed, cults themselves can be as strict as a monastery. Adherents in Heaven's Gate were not allowed to watch television or read anything but the Bible. At one point members had to wear gloves at all times and communicate through written messages, with speech limited to "yes", "no" and "I don't know". A former member is quoted as saying that the group had a "procedure for every conscious moment of life".

To find oneself, in the Cardinal's phrase, in an age of relativism, is not new. In the ancient world, as the Olympian deities of the Greek pantheon lost their attraction, cults multiplied. AN Wilson points out that religions (except Judaism) were mutually tolerant of one another. Worshipers were eclectic, moving from one shrine to another without the slightest feeling of inconsistency. And, as a matter of fact, we can find examples of most of the features of Heaven's Gate in the ancient world. The priests who served the fertility goddess, Cybele, were eunuchs, as were eight of the male members of Heaven's Gate, whose castration had been carried out, according to the San Diego police, with satisfactory surgical skill. The followers of Orphism regarded the body as a prison or tomb, since it imprisoned the divine spark; likewise the leader of Heaven's Gate wrote that "bodies were merely the temporary container for the soul". As one of the cult members remarked on the farewell videotape, bodies are like automobiles and when they finally "wear out and conk out ... you ... go and get another car ... I mean that's all we're talking about. It's not a big deal".

It is a big deal for everybody else, for relatives and friends and for the rest of us. Regrettably, adults are free to give away all their possessions, cut every family tie and join a cult. They commit no crime. Society can only look on, helpless. The age of relativism is also deeply unsettling for believers in the established religions, for those who are members, as I am, of the Church of England, or of the Roman Catholic Church. It is one thing to have doubts, to waver between belief and complete disbelief. It is quite another to be faced with mix 'n' match versions of religion and with a decline into humanism, which has all the strength of weak tea. I want neither cults nor watered-down faith.

The finest party gets the dustbin vote

by Polly Toynbee

The Liberal Democrats always get the graveyard slot in the daily morning press conferences. At 8am, the early hour and bleary faces only add to the unreality of the event. The cameras are there, the bright lights, a glitzy set and all those familiar Brunson-Oakley-Goodman-Sergeant television faces, rather more famous than the Lib Dem front bench. Yes, all the paraphernalia of a real political party is there.

But the struggle to be taken seriously tells on Paddy Ashdown's furrowed brow, always only a dangerous sliver away from irrelevance. Walking a perilous path above the rocks of mockery, he reaches for the highest ground in search of justification for his party's existence. That is what the Lib Dems are for.

Their manifesto is undoubtedly the best of the three. It offers those things we know we need most: proportional representation, taxation to spend on a real improvement in education, green taxes to pay for public transport, a strong, positive view of Europe and a radical trust in genuine democracy. Costed, sensible and popular goals, if only ...

Among liberals, you hear the strong wish that a dangerously large Labour landslide might be tempered by a goodly slab of Lib Dem seats, guarantors of radicalism to stop Labour slithering further into the mud of compromise on every issue. If only ...

The irony is that just as they have found a valuable ideological role, outflanking Labour on the radical wing, they appear to be in trouble. Playing piggy-in-the-middle for all those years – left of Tory, right of Labour – was a miserable squeeze. Now at last circumstances and Paddy Ashdown's boldness combine to offer a high profile on the political spectrum. And yet, alas, the outlook may be grim.

At the weekend their poll rating fell to a dismal 9 per cent – a blip maybe, or maybe not. According to MORI, intending Lib Dem voters are the softest and least tenacious supporters of all three parties. They are good citizens, far more likely to go out and vote on the day than either Labour or Tory voters – but when asked how strongly they support their party, only 9 per cent of them are enthusiastic enough to say their support is Very Strong (while 21 per cent of Tories and 29 per cent of Labour describe their support as Very Strong). Asked if they might still change their vote, 37 per cent of Lib Dem supporters said yes, compared with only 33 per cent of Tories and 18 per cent of Labour.

What do we know about the Lib Dem voter? You might expect a gallant band of radicals, keeping alight the flicker-



The Liberal Democrats deserve better than the muddled souls who vote for them. They seem doomed to failure. And yet ...

ing candle of liberal idealism through these dark ages. Not so, sadly. Lib Dem voters seem to have remarkably little in common with their leaders or their manifesto. Take Europe. Now surely Lib Dem pro-Europeanism has been loud and clear, a heart-warming clarion call in the growing Euro-sceptic mood of the times. Astonishingly, according to MORI, more Lib Dem voters want to withdraw from Europe than either Labour or Tory voters. What on earth does that mean?

What else do we know about Lib Dem voters? They are a higher social class than Tory and Labour supporters, with more AEs and fewer DEs. A higher proportion of the readership of this newspaper votes Lib Dem than of any other paper (20 per cent), and is religiously they are rather more non-conformist than the other two parties. On one issue they are in tune with the Lib Dem leadership: many more of them make education their priority than voters for other parties.

But how radical are they on traditional liberal issues? Not at all. Take the monarchy, for instance. Only 20 per cent of Lib Dem voters are anti-monarchist, compared with 32

per cent of Labour and 11 per cent of Tories. On caning in schools, a surprising 64 per cent of Lib Dems want it brought back. On abortion, a poll of women showed that Lib Dems were more anti-abortion than either of the other parties: 27 per cent of Lib Dem women want abortion made more difficult and only 9 per cent want it to be made easier.

Bob Worcester of MORI is caustic about the Lib Dem voter: "There is no such thing as a natural Lib Dem. It is not a calling or a commitment but an opt-out, or else a tactical vote. People float in and out of this way station. If you are angry with your natural party, you turn to the Lib Dems. It is the dustbin vote."

This is depressing. Ashdown and his team with their fine manifesto step out feebly supported by little more than a bog of random reject votes. But there are, as I have said, a great many very good reasons to support the Lib Dems, so perhaps it does not matter that their vote comes from those who do not much agree with them.

Despite his harsh words, Bob Worcester has a little comfort for the Lib Dems. He thinks they will do better than their

present poll showing. The prospect of a 200-seat Labour landslide will frighten some of the more hesitant would-be Labour voters into stepping back in alarm and voting Lib Dem instead, to restore some balance. Tactical voting in the south is on the increase, with some 11 per cent of voters saying they will vote tactically to get the Conservatives out. Lib Dem success in local government should help, though converting local to national votes has always been an uphill struggle and a constant source of bitter disappointment.

This is a sad story. It is by no means clear that Labour will deliver proportional representation unless forced to by the Lib Dems – only Blair knows his true intentions. Who will stop Labour sliding further into anti-Europeanism? Who will keep Labour at least a little green? Who will dare to tell

Labour that taxes may have to rise, or protect us from some of Labour's more illiberal instincts?

If yet again the Lib Dems find themselves a small and haphazard little clump on the green benches, what then? Ahead may lie just more of the same, a lifetime of permanent protest, waving and drowning from the sidelines for ever.

Politics is the most wasteful of all endeavours. If Lib Dem candidates and local parties put a fraction of their energies into a single issue campaign or into volunteering for some good cause, they could achieve almost anything with the time they waste on national political activity. Consider the leaflets printed, the myriad committee meetings, canvassing, fundraising, Christmas fayres and summer fêtes, petitions and door knocking. Think of the emotional energy spent on frictions and rivalries, plotting for places on policy sub-committees all too soon forgotten. What an empty waste of weekends and evenings, doing so little good to anyone. What keeps them going? Paddy Ashdown grits his teeth and juts his jaw with an air of noble endurance. Almost unerringly he says and does the right thing – and so, maybe, one day, perhaps, if only, if only ...

Geisha girls of the literary world

Pimlico, 8pm. A wine bar hubbub and headed to the firm with the publishing trade, at the fun end of the working day. Flesh-and-blooded walls. A Booker-level author, a publisher-turned-author, a literary editor, a journalist: powerful folk in the literary world. With them, making the party go for the sake of books coming out next week, are publishers' publicity people. Bizarre. The people being fêted are men. The others are women: but not called women. They're publicity girls.

Flavia's mobile phone rings. "Sorry," she says. "Kilburn? Why should I go – oh, alright. Name? Address? OK." She closes it. "Sorry – one of my authors!" and carries on about the New York reading tour. Discussion shifts to passages in the about-to-be-promoted book. "That's exactly what it's like when someone gives you a blow job," says the author. "I love being surrounded by publicity girls. Longer-haired the better. My idea of a great time," he confides later to a friend, in the Gents.

I've never met a publicity man. Ninety-nine per cent of people doing this job are women. They serve many masters. "You have to submit yourself to everybody else's will," says Flavia. "You're always serving the author, editor, sales department, journalist, bookseller."

Some people buying books may not realise what hard work lies behind the way books get to them. Flavia planned and accompanied authors' tours, lunched with journalists (telling them about the book), rushed copies to reviewers, interviewers, producers, chatted up booksellers, editors, book-



Ruth Padel

Publishers employ publicity 'girls' to promote, wine, dine and mother their clients. Not to think

show presenters: anyone who can get the book into the air, page, screen and computer-for public sale. "It's an essential job," says Flavia. "It helps books reach readers. If I've liked a book, I want everyone to share what gave me pleasure. I love seeing a book I worked on go into the bestseller lists or even sell better than anyone expected. You're glad you've done that for it." "It's an important job when done well," agrees Rebecca. "It shouldn't be underestimated."

The job's not underestimated – but the people who do the job often are. "I used to feel apologetic when I told people what I did," Rebecca says. "You were made to feel you were a lower form of life. It was something I resented and fought against. I used to think, 'You're making an assumption about me and I'm going to show you who I actually am.'"

"People pay you for a certain skill," says Tilda. "Really? Tell me more." They're not interested in that. The men at Flavia's table don't want her literary opinions (though she's read and thought about these men's books). They enjoy her company and listen avidly to what she says about marketability. "It's his breakthrough book in terms of accessibility," the journalist will hear. Meaning there's a popular angle he can write up. Flavia may hate the book and its author, but has to serve both. ("I do tell journalists when I don't like a book," says Rebecca. "Otherwise you lose your credibility." Not what editor, author and sales department always want to hear.)

Author-nannying is part of the job. Some male authors would like sex with "their" publicity girl on a reading

tour. You have to set boundaries without injuring your author's opinion of his own performance or of the service his publisher provides. "In nine years on the road," says Tilda, "I've only had a couple of really nasty moments. I've been lucky; or sent out the right signals. Still, I'm sympathetic to authors on tour. You can forgive them quite a lot. They've been writing this thing alone for God knows how long, and now they're in public with it every night. I don't mind soothing nerves. It's carrying their train tickets for them, showing their ticket to the guard as if you were their mother or their geisha, that gets me." Christ! Do you have to hold the towel when they wash after a pee? "The ones that aren't so famous are the worst. They're suddenly playing the great author. You're the one they play to hardest."

"Authors aren't the biggest problem, though," says Rebecca. "Journalists are." Really? Tell me more. "When you need them, interesting them in a first-time author, that's fine. They can be nice to you then. But when you've got a big author, something they need, you become this powerful person for them. They resent needing you. Journalists are parasitical on publicity girls but they really hate the fact they rely on them. They don't observe normal courtesies on the phone." She used to get furious and phone them back and say, "Can't you say 'Thank you' and 'Goodbye' at the end of a call?" Surely that's only men? "Nope. Women too. It's equal. That's something, I suppose. Something worse."

"There's something about being a woman that lets you do publicity," says Flavia. "And it has to be said there's something about the job which attracts

young women. They often go into it without understanding the ambiguity and dilemma of what they're asked to do. I get through by telling myself my opinions are important. But that does undermine the job."

When I publish a book, I love being looked after. Of course I do. It's very nice to be bought drinks, have someone arrange readings, distribute fliers, chat to booksellers. But why are the people who do these things for me always women? It's not that I want men serving me (and I can carry my own train tickets, thanks), but I mind that it's still like this at a time when Greenwich Observatory is selling off the last minutes of the millennium. You might expect the literary world to be a touch more self-sufficient than some. But it's thrown up this service with an implicit geisha-value agenda infuriatingly intact. At the fun end of the working day, that wine-bar is work for Flavia, on and off the phone. She can't, if she wanted to, get merrily sloshed like the men she's serving. It's that way round still. And no one's surprised.

Poetry readings this month set up by (mainly) publicity girls:

Elaine Feinstein and Jamie McKendrick, *The Voice Box*, Festival Hall, Tuesday 8 April, 7.30pm (0171-960 4342).

Tom Lynch, *Poetry Society*, 22 Bedford Square, Covent Garden, Wednesday 9 April 7.30pm (0171-240 2133).

City Writers, Southampton, series of readings in *The Gantry* (behind the "Rat and Parrot" in the heart of Southampton), (01703 572739).

Carol Ann Duffy and Michael Donaghy, *Galway Arts Festival*, Wednesday 16 April, 8.30pm. (Galway Arts Centre, 00 353 91 568 303).

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London Clubs' £189m bid for rival is referred to MMC

Magnus Grimond

London Clubs' £189m bid for London casino rivals Capital Corporation was yesterday unexpectedly referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. John Taylor, the consumer and corporate affairs minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, said the possible combination of the two groups, "raises competition concerns in relation to the London casinos market".

The news prompted London Clubs to lapse its offer of 47 shares

for every 100 in Capital and sent shares in the latter down 14p to 186p. London's shares slipped 7p to 401.5p.

Success for London Clubs would have given it at least 60 per cent of the capital's £1.7bn upmarket gambling industry, adding Crockfords and the Colony Club to the seven clubs it already owns, including the exclusive Ritz and Les Ambassadeurs venues. Mr Taylor said he had made his decision in the light of advice given by the Office of Fair Trading, but observers also suggested that with ministers' minds distracted by campaigning he had decided it was easier to let the MMC decide the issue.

Greg Feehly, leisure analyst with Kleinwort Benson, said: "I can't think of a good reason why it should be referred to the MMC. This is not something which would harm the UK consumer. There is no pricing issue involved here." As the clubs are private and a large proportion of the clientele from abroad, he argued that there is no reason for the UK authorities to become involved.

"The UK consumer or casino-goer is not going to be worse off by this going through ... and you're not really talking about the London market but 60 per cent of the international high-roller market." London Clubs said its board would now meet to discuss its next move in the light of the decision. Alan Goodenough, chief executive, said: "Naturally, we are disappointed by the recommendation of the director general of fair trading. We believe that the arguments which we submitted to the OFT provided sound evidence

that there were no adverse competition issues." The decision was seen as a victory for Capital Corporation. Alan Hearn, Mr Goodenough's opposite number at the group, said the referral would allow management "to focus on developing further the group's valuable business, without the distraction and expense of an hostile bid. I welcome the opportunity to demonstrate to shareholders the significant value we can create as an independent company."

He said that they had plugged the

gaps caused by departure of 11 out of the group's 30 administrative staff, revealed recently. "It's business as usual", he said. Mr Hearn said he was not privy to the reasons for the referral, but he said he expected them to relate to market share, the increased barriers to entry caused by consolidation in the industry and the potential restriction on choice. He said the gaming industry "generated a lot of income for this country and London in particular". Anything which made it less attractive to foreigners could

reduce that income, he suggested. Julian Easthope, an analyst at Union Bank of Switzerland, compared the present referral with the similar circumstances of Pleasure's bid for Trident Television in 1984. That proposed takeover, which would have given Pleasure two-thirds of the London casino market, was blocked by the MMC. The monopolies regulator justified that decision on grounds including the restriction on choice for gamblers "blackballed" at any one location.

Sterling back at its Black Wednesday level

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

The pound passed a key psychological barrier yesterday when it rose above its minimum rate in the European exchange rate mechanism. For the first time since "Black Wednesday" in September 1992 it climbed above the DM2.7780 floor.

The breakthrough, which is sure to worry British exporters, was described by analysts in the financial markets as a side-effect of the dollar's strength. It reached its highest level for more than four years, thanks to the strength of the American economy and the prospect of further increases in interest rates across the Atlantic.

But comments by Robin Cook, the shadow foreign secretary, indicating that a Labour government will be in no hurry to take Britain into the single currency, also helped underpin the pound.

Mr Cook's announcement that Britain was unlikely to join during the course of the next parliament meant sterling once again benefited from its status as a safe haven from EMU.

The weekend meeting of European finance ministers in

Noordwijk was seen as making it more likely that the single currency will start on time but with a loose interpretation of whether or not countries satisfy the economic criteria.

A newly rising exchange rate will help take the pressure off Kenneth Clarke when he is advised by the Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, at Thursday's meeting, to increase base rates. Figures since their last meeting have pointed to a buoyant economy. In the Chancellor's own words, "Britain is booming."

But most City economists think it will fall to the next Chancellor - and they believe it will be Gordon Brown - to raise rates soon after the election. This prospect is helping to underpin the strong pound.

In an active day's trading, gilts also soared on the tail of other government bond markets. And shares closed higher too, the FTSE 100 index ending up more than 35 points at 4,271.7.

"The dollar is dominant, but it was a nice psychological moment for sterling yesterday," said Alison Cottrell at Paine Webber. She, like other analysts, predicted the pound's new show of strength would continue. Gerard Lyons, chief econo-

mist at DKB in London, said: "The dollar is the key. The economic fundamentals are better in the US than either Germany or Japan. The pound has risen on the dollar's coat-tails."

Since the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates by a quarter point at the end of last month there has been fresh evidence of the robust economic outlook. Friday brought figures showing another big increase in employment and rising wage costs.

The currency markets were also reassured by comments from US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, visiting Japan at the end of last week. He indicated that the US administration would not rely on a weak dollar to correct the country's trade deficit with Japan.

The dollar passed the ¥125 mark for the first time since February 1993. Analysts see ¥130 as the next target.

It also passed DM1.71, the highest level for three weeks, before ending just below that level after profit-taking in European trading.

However, the weekend's single currency developments also favoured the pound against the mark. The German currency was weak across the board against other EU currencies.

Along with Chancellor Helmut Kohl's decision to stand for re-election, the Noordwijk meeting persuaded investors that the political impetus towards EMU had been renewed.

This suggests that there could be a greater degree of flexibility in deciding which countries will qualify - or in other words, more fudging of the Maastricht criteria. Eric Fishwick at Nikko Europe said: "The markets have sensed a softening of tone on the part of Germany."

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Ahead of the game: Martin Edwards warned wages would continue to spiral unless transfer fees were abolished

Photograph: Adrian Dennis

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

Manchester United's chief executive, Martin Edwards, warned yesterday that footballers' wages would continue to spiral unless the transfer structure was altered in the wake of the Bosman ruling.

Arguing for the abolition of transfer fees in the British game, Mr Edwards said wages of United's 46-strong playing staff had risen by £2.5m on the previous year. Much of the increase was due to players seek-

Manchester United players' wages increase by £2.5m

ing higher wages as a result of the Bosman ruling which allows players to move for no fee between European countries if they are at the end of their contract. "We would welcome the outlawing of transfer fees," Mr Edwards said. "The current system encourages you to sign overseas players."

Manchester United's total wage bill increased by around £5.5m last year, of which 40 per cent was due to player wage increases. Mr Edwards was speaking as Manchester United announced profits of £19.4m for the six months to 31 January compared to £15.2m in the previous year.

Gate receipts, television revenue and merchandise sales were all up strongly. The figures were also boosted by increased capacity at Old Trafford following redevelopment.

The club revealed it had made profits of £7.5m from its successful run in the European Cup. Mr Edwards said that win-

ning the competition would cost the club money in the current financial year because of the huge bonuses that would be paid to players. However, the long-term benefits of victory would be considerable. Group turnover was up from £30m to £50m.

Meanwhile, Sheffield United, the Nationwide first division club, has sold two of its subsidiaries for almost £1m. The business include the Le Coq Sportif brand, which is being sold to Gilbert & Pollard, a sporting supplies company.

Investment column, page 22

BT to spend £30m on telemarketing centres

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

British Telecom's 21 million customers can expect to hear from its army of marketing staff at least four times a year, it emerged yesterday, as the company signalled a new phase in the increasingly tough battle with the cable companies.

BT announced plans to spend £30m building two call centres, with the creation of 2,000 jobs. Each building will house 650 telemarketing terminals arranged on a single floor the size of one-and-a-half football pitches.

The first will open on a greenfield site in Doncaster in October, just as Cable & Wireless's £5bn merged cable group launches a national brand to compete with BT and BSkyB.

The second centre, north of Newcastle, opens in November. The investment follows the opening of the first huge telemarketing operation in Warrington last December.

BT also said it aimed to double the size of an older telemarketing operation in Glasgow, adding another 330 seats, and refurbish another centre in Bristol. The investment in the programme, which is the brainchild of BT's chief executive, Sir Peter Bonfield, comes on top of an estimated advertising budget this year of up to £200m.



Sir Peter Bonfield: The man behind the programme

Most of the 2,000 jobs are part-time, with employees working on average 25 hours a week. BT said with commission payments they could double their basic pay of £4.50 an hour.

Each member of staff will be graded in detailed league tables measuring everything from the length of calls to the take-up rate of product offerings.

Alan Cunningham, BT's general manager for telemarketing, said the staff would call only BT customers to follow up quarterly marketing mail-shots.

During each conversation, lasting an average of seven minutes, the staff will tell customers about BT pricing and discount packages. Mr Cun-

ningham said homes would still get a call even if they had already signed up for the Friends and Family and Premier Line discount schemes.

"It's like a friend calling to make sure people are getting the best deal. The overwhelming majority of customers like it and our calls are well received. This is all about building relationships," he said.

So far the awareness strategy seems to be paying off. Over the past year the number of homes taking up the Friends and Family offer has risen from 2.5 million to 11 million. Out of BT's total customer base of 21 million. Of these, about 3 million are members of the light user scheme and would not be eligible to join other discount packages.

Yet in recent months the cable companies have scored significant success, raising the number of BT customers poached from 60,000 a month to more than 75,000 a month. Some 2.3 million homes now take cable telephone services, though this remains a disappointingly small figure compared with the 8.5 million homes which could take the service. BT has meanwhile managed to stabilise last year's dip in residential phone lines, largely because the overall market is growing faster than the rate at which customers go elsewhere.

UK sales slump hits car giants

Chris Godsmark

Ford and Vauxhall saw their share of the British car market slide last month as the industry reported a "dramatic" and unexpected slowdown in the sales figures.

The statistics, from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, showed registrations fell by 0.23 per cent in March compared with the same month last year, to 179,863. Between January and March sales have risen by just 18,500 to 549,534, with the bulk of the growth made in January.

Roger King from the SMMT said the slowdown "seemed to be in conflict with surveys showing retail spending picking up". One possibility was that buyers had been put off by the election uncertainty and the likelihood of higher interest rates whichever party wins power.

Privately manufacturers yesterday questioned the validity of the statistics, citing the early Easter break and a backlog of registration documents last week.

The figures continued the worrying surge in sales of imported cars established last year. In March imports accounted for 65.29 per cent of the market, up from 61 per cent in March 1996. At the same time the traditional volume makes, Ford, Vauxhall and Rover, all

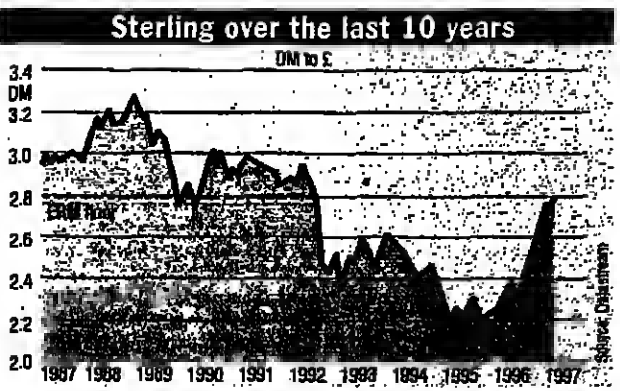
did badly. Ford's market share was worst hit, slumping to 16.9 per cent in March from just under 20 per cent. The US giant blamed the drop on radical changes to dealer bonuses, introduced in February.

From now on Ford dealers receive bonuses based on annual regional sales targets, instead of the monthly goals widely blamed in the industry for artificially inflating the figures.

A Ford spokeswoman said the picture was not as bleak as some in the industry had suggested. "The Mondeo is now the best-selling car in the UK. So far this year Ford has the top three selling models. That's very good news."

Vauxhall's share of the market dropped from 15.5 per cent to 13.46 per cent, while Rover's share slipped by 1 percentage point, to 10.94 per cent. The main beneficiaries were European imported brands, with Fiat enjoying its best March since the 1970s, grabbing 4.6 per cent of the market. Volkswagen sold more than 9,000 cars in March, taking the German group's share to over 5 per cent.

Jay Nagley, from marketing consultants Quadrangle, said customers' preferences had shifted. "People are moving away from volume brands to makes like Fiat and VW. On this basis BMW could be outselling Rover in five years' time."



Opinion poll chief warns about false election 'leaks'

John Willcock

Robert Worcester, chief executive of MORI, the opinion pollsters, has written to John Kemp-Welch, chairman of the London Stock Exchange, urging him to clamp down on insider dealers who manipulate share prices by "leaking" non-existent poll results in the run up to a general election.

The letter has raised eyebrows in the City, where some attributed it to publicity seeking on Mr Worcester's part. Others were perplexed at the suggestion that, this time round, it would make any difference at all to the share prices whichever party won the election. If anything Mr Blair seems to be to the right of past Tory premiers

like Edward Heath and Harold Macmillan.

Mr Worcester writes that City commentators have already said that during the election campaign the stock market will be buffeted by the fortunes of the political parties as measured by the opinion polls.

He says he does not worry about this, as information will always drive share prices, whether the announcement of economic, employment or other statistics.

"What I do worry about is the rumours of results of private polls, or worse, fictitious poll findings, leaked out by unscrupulous traders in an effort to manipulate the markets. In my view, the Stock Exchange should be concerned about this."

Mr Worcester says he wrote

to Mr Kemp-Welch's predecessor Sir Nicholas Goodison in 1979 about this problem.

"In that election over 100 telephone calls were taken by the Daily Express and ourselves about rumours of a 'last minute swing to Labour', reportedly showing a 2 per cent Labour lead, coming out on the Tuesday before the election."

Mr Worcester writes that some £1bn in the value of shares was wiped out by these rumours of a poll which never existed. Later it was rumoured of a Gallup poll in the Telegraph - equally non-existent - which caused City traders to panic, he writes.

City sceptics might argue that it is difficult to see anyone "panicking" whatever the result of the present election.

STOCK MARKETS									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Yield (%)	Index	Close	Day's change
FTSE 100	4271.70	+35.10	+0.8	4444.30	4056.60	3.77	Nikkei	15000	+100
FTSE 250	4518.40	+3.60	+0.1	4729.40	4469.40	3.55	Dow Jones	8000	+50
FTSE 350	2106.40	+14.00	+0.7	2194.30	2017.90	3.73	FTSE SmallCap	2284.27	+1.95
FTSE All-Share	2077.88	+12.91	+0.6	2163.94	1989.78	3.67	New York	6577.06	+50.99
Hong Kong	12287.84	+83.25	+0.7	13068.24	12055.17	3.42	Tokyo	17715.67	+144.92
Frankfurt	3312.88	+67.85	+2.1	3460.64	2848.77	1.65	Paris	12000	+100

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
Short sterling					UK medium gvt				
Index	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	Index	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year
UK	5.13	7.03	7.69	8.06	7.71	8.18			
US	5.90	6.22	6.87	6.51	7.08	6.64			
Japan	0.44	0.53	2.10	1.82					
Germany	3.17	3.34	5.90	6.39	6.88				

CURRENCIES									
Sterling				Dollar				Gold	
Index	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago	Index	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago	Index	Yesterday
£/DM	1.5297	-1.08	1.5275	£/¥	0.0136	+0.20	0.0547	DM/£	0.6536
£/US\$	1.6280	-0.05	1.6306	¥/£	0.0136	+0.25	0.0547	US\$/£	0.6536
DM/£	1.6280	-0.05	1.6306	£/DM	0.6536	+0.25	0.0547	DM/£	0.6536
¥/£	0.0136	+0.20	0.0547	£/¥	0.0136	+0.25	0.0547	¥/£	0.0136

Other West exchange rates and 60 West Day in 1980 hours.

Pound				Dollar			
Index	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago	Index	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago
£/London	1.5297	-1.08	1.5275	£/London	0.0136	+0.20	0.0547
£/NY	1.6280	-0.05	1.6306	£/NY	0.0136	+0.25	0.0547
DM/£	1.6280	-0.05	1.6306	DM/£	0.6536	+0.25	0.0547
¥/£	0.0136	+0.20	0.0547	¥/£	0.0136	+0.25	0.0547

OTHER INDICATORS			
Index	Yesterday	Day's Change	Year Ago
US\$/£	0.6536	-0.17	0.6325
DM/£	1.6280	-0.05	1.6306

Bankers Trust buys Alex Brown for \$1.7bn

In a clear sign that the prohibition-era wall between commercial banks and securities firms in the US is breaking down, Bankers Trust New York Corp yesterday announced the acquisition of brokerage firm Alex Brown for \$1.7bn (£1.04bn), writes David Osborne.

The deal, coming close on the heels of February's \$10.2bn merger between Morgan Stanley and Dean Witter, Discoverer, will rekindle speculation about consolidation on Wall Street.

Bankers Trust, America's seventh-largest bank, took advantage of steps taken last year

by the Federal Reserve to loosen the rules that have traditionally curbed the involvement of US banks in the securities business. The restrictions date back to the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act.

The Fed raised to 25 per cent from 10 per cent the proportion of revenue that US banks can earn through the underwriting of securities.

While there is wide anticipation of mergers between securities companies - as with the Morgan Stanley-Dean Witter marriage - Wall Street will now look for more swoops by banks on mid-size brokerages.

مكتبة من الأصل



COMMENT

The operators who will do well are the ones who got in early and snapped up franchises for a song before Sir George cottoned on to quite what a gravy train he had set in motion

Turkeys home to roost after great rail sell-off

The gyrations yesterday in the share prices of Prism and Go-Ahead are a timely reminder that rail privatisation may not prove to be the one-way bet it once seemed. The cause of the panic was a report by a former Coopers & Lybrand man suggesting that the 25 passenger franchises let by Sir George Young, Prism and Go-Ahead have contrived between them to pick up the five turkeys. Tim Powell, who now runs his own transport consultancy, reckons that, even on the most optimistic assumptions about revenue growth, the five franchises will lose money and, if his least optimistic scenario comes to pass, the industry could be coming back to the next government cap in hand asking for another £1.5bn in subsidy in addition to the £8bn it has already pocketed.

You can quibble with his methodology (Prism and Go-Ahead, surprise, surprise, reckon the spur of private enterprise will grow income at double the rate assumed by Mr Powell). You can also question the provenance of his report which was produced for Save our Railways, trade union-backed organisation dedicated to fighting rail privatisation. But what is harder to argue with is the central message of his analysis. This is that the operators who will do well are the ones who got in early and snapped up franchises for a song before Sir George cottoned on to quite what a gravy train he had set in motion. Stagecoach may be making a poor fist out of running South West Trains but it could end up making £478m profit by the time its seven-year franchise ends. Conversely, the operators who will do worst are, in the main, those who arrived later or whose subsidies are not matched by equally large passenger revenues. The squeeze comes because income needs to rise at a much higher rate than subsidies fall in order to produce a profit.

The alternative of taking a batchet to controllable costs, manpower in the main, has been undermined by SVT's unhappy discovery that it is hard to run a train service without drivers. Cynical franchisees could make enough money in the first couple of years to recoup their investment before the reductions in subsidy begin to bite. The government would then have the unenviable choice of forking out more support or finding someone else to run the railways. But this, in all likelihood, will not be Sir George's problem.

Blair winning war to woo the City
"Flexibility Plus" sounds more like an advertisement for a credit card than Tony Blair's conversion to the cause of flexible labour markets but it was the latter Mr Blair was referring to in his speech to City and business leaders yesterday. We have come to expect lectures from Mr Blair on the merits of free market economics, but that shouldn't take away from the significance of his latest sayings on the subject, for he seems to have gone further than ever in accepting the underlying merit of everything that's happened over the past 18 years.

Behind the sterling and dollar upstarts
What a delicious irony that it is the prospect of the pound staying out of another European currency arrangement that has finally helped it regain the level it last saw when it was catapulted out of Europe the last time. And how like the toasty world of the foreign exchange markets to be driving higher the two currencies – the dollar and sterling – which are most in danger of a revival of the inflation which has, in the long term, led to their steady depreciation against the classic strong currencies of this world. Have things changed so much that we can not expect to hear from now on the word "pound" or "dollar" unqualified by the adjective "strong"? It is certainly true that the Anglo-Saxon economies are buoyant in ways the Germans and Japanese can only dream of at the moment. Even if both of these pick up as expected during the course of 1997, they are not going to catch up to the US or UK. This sterling rally could go much further. Yet it is too soon to say that the tide of history has turned. The economic fundamentals suggest the opposite, and however long it takes them, the fundamentals tend to win out in the end. Take trade. America's trade is deep in the red already; Britain's soon could be if the unfavourable trends continue, and if the means of pain from export turn out to be true. The underlying trade picture will tend to reverse the pattern of currency appreciation eventually – even if American nerves do not fray sooner, leading the US to bully Japan into efforts to prop up the yen.

RJB shares jump on 'clean coal' environment prospects

Michael Harrison
Shares in RJB Mining, Britain's biggest coal producer, leapt 10 per cent yesterday as hopes grew that a future Labour government would support its plans for a new generation of environmentally-friendly clean coal power stations.

joining RJB and Texaco to study the feasibility of building a 400-megawatt clean coal station next to RJB's Kellingley pit in west Yorkshire. Both RJB and National Power warned, however, that government backing was essential to support the commercial development of the new technology.

Richard Budge, chief executive of RJB, said that the £150m cost of this could be met by keeping the levy at its present level of 3.7 per cent rather than reducing it to 2.2 per cent next year. He warned that consumers would end up paying either way since if the "dash for gas" by generators continued then alternative coal generation would not be available.

But the company says that the world-wide market for the technology could be worth up to \$500bn (£307bn) by 2010. Building 5,000-megawatts of clean coal plant would be enough to satisfy about 10 per cent of demand in Britain and would create a market for 10-12 million tonnes of coal.



Burning question: Richard Budge, RJB chief executive, warned that consumers could lose out in the dash for gas

British Energy turns to gas generation

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent
British Energy, the nuclear power operator, yesterday revealed its first move into gas-generation since privatisation last year in a joint initiative with the French oil group, Elf Aquitaine.

British Energy is already examining building its own gas generating plant next to one of its reactors, but abandoned the proposal last summer. Though the group has seen big productivity and efficiency gains at its existing plants under Robert Hawley, chief executive, it wants to use the almost guaranteed income stream from nuclear generation to diversify into other energy sources.

Separately it emerged yesterday that Mobil, the US-owned oil group, has closed four regional offices in its gas marketing business which sells fuel mainly to large business customers. The offices, in Edinburgh, Birmingham, London and Sevenoaks, were run by outside contractors. The company said no Mobil staff were affected and the workers hit had been offered work elsewhere. A spokesman added the four centres accounted for 5 per cent of sales and had become uneconomic.

However, he added: "It has the potential to be the best option for new build as it meets tougher environmental restrictions." The blue gas desulphurisation equipment fitted to coal stations now filters out sulphur emissions but does not stop the main greenhouse gas carbon monoxide. Nor does it improve plant efficiency. The new clean coal stations being examined by RJB and its partners are up to 40 per cent more efficient.

Burmah profits hit by strong pound

Tom Stevenson
City Editor
Burmah Castrol warned yesterday its profits would fall by 9 per cent, more than £20m, this year if sterling maintained its current strength, making it the latest in a long line of companies to be hit by the soaring pound. Jonathan Fry, chief executive, also cautioned that Europe and North America remained difficult markets for the motor oil that dominated group sales but said the Far East was booming.

Profits before tax rose 6 per cent during 1996 to £261.4m, despite the early effects of the pound's rise as strong turnover growth in Asia more than made up for sluggish markets in Europe and severe price competition in North America. According to Mr Fry, five of Burmah's top 10 markets are now in Asia and the company is creating 350 jobs in the region this year to add to the 400 it added last year.

Greenbury 'breached guide' over Lloyds TSB bosses

Terry Macalister
Sir Richard Greenbury, Marks & Spencer executive director of Lloyds TSB, faces shareholder criticism next week for allowing Lloyds TSB to apparently breach his own corporate governance guidelines.

Some shareholders who intend to go to the Lloyds TSB annual meeting on 15 April plan to ask why the company's board are allowed to set their own pay instead of leaving the issue in the hands of a remuneration committee. Feelings have been running high since it was revealed chief executive Peter Ellwood had been awarded a 1996 bonus of £679,000, bringing his total remuneration package to £1.2m.

While the Greenbury report suggested a remuneration committee should be the final arbiter of pay, at Lloyds TSB it is the board which takes a final decision after advice from a pay committee. Last night Sir Richard insisted his Greenbury report offered only recommendations that should not be taken as hard and fast rules to be implemented whatever the situation. He said: "What I wanted [with the Greenbury report] was to ensure there was an adequate level of discussion so that shareholders had transparency and could question those who set executive pay levels."

Andrew Regan has failed in his attempt to get his bid approach to the Co-op movement formally discussed at the Co-operative Wholesale Society's annual general meeting next month. It was expected that Mr Regan's Lancia Trust would try to ensure that a resolution supporting his proposals would appear on the agenda at the meeting on 17 May. However, the deadline for submissions was 2 April and the CWS board had received no proposals supporting him by that date. As resolutions can only be tabled by CWS members, Mr Regan was relying on the support of sympathetic members to put forward a motion on his behalf. The board kept the deadline open until the following weekend to give postal applications more time but still received no resolutions from any Regan supporters. It is also understood that at the board meeting on 2 April the directors were unanimous in their support for maintaining the CWS in its current form.

Regan misses Co-op deadline

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent
The CWS concedes that Mr Regan could have a special general meeting called but would need 10 of the society's 300 members to support his proposals. The CWS annual meeting takes place in Manchester on 17 May and will be attended by around 300 society members. A full list of resolutions will not be published until 19 April when the CWS will publish its results for last year. The figures are expected to show a decline in profits from the previous year's £30m though on the slide into the red that some have been expecting. The Co-op has also shrugged off suggestions that a strategic review ordered by its chief executive, Graham Melmoth, has only just come to light. The CWS says that Mr Melmoth ordered the review last autumn following his appointment and that it was public knowledge at that time. It said that the results of the review would not be known for some months but repeated that there were no plans to sell any of its businesses.

Microsoft buys itself a place in the Internet's future



Searching for ways to maintain its lead in home computing, Microsoft has paid \$425m (£261m) for WebTV, a tiny start-up company that sells devices that enable viewers to connect to the Internet through their television sets. The deal, though relatively modest in dollar terms, is being viewed as critical to several regards. Above all, it signals an effort by Microsoft's Bill Gates to position himself over the next few years of the home computer, the television set and the Internet. At the same time, it also puts Microsoft in the thick of the struggle just getting under way here to agree on new standards for digital, as opposed to analog, television technology. The battle has to be settled by 2006, the date set by the US government for the introduction of digital broadcasts.

The purchase of a tiny start-up company for £261m is a crucial step for Bill Gates, writes David Usborne
stood aloof from the Internet rush until it felt suddenly threatened by companies growing out of it, like Netscape. Indeed, the WebTV deal is Microsoft's largest Internet-related acquisition ever. Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser, developed in the face of Netscape's competition, and Windows CE operating system for pocket computers will be incorporated in WebTV products.

The stakes involved in both the digital television revolution and in the marriage of TV and the Internet are astonishingly high. The potential market for replacing all of America's TV sets with new digital versions alone will be worth as much as \$150bn. The issue of which standards should be used is crucial. For now, US broadcasters are pursuing a standard that will only provide for much clearer, home-theatre style pictures and sound, but nothing more. Microsoft is now joining a growing coalition in the computer industry demanding that the standards must also make the new generation of TVs Internet-intelligent.

It is not hard, meanwhile, to fathom the lure of television to companies like Microsoft. Currently, home computers have penetrated a little more than one third of America's homes – and merely 10 per cent of homes in Europe and Japan. Television, however, has found its way into 98 per cent of US homes (better even than the telephone). Some analysts worry, never the less, that Microsoft is still uncertain of where to go next and indeed is following a schizophrenic strategy. On the one hand, it is fighting to maintain consumer commitment to the full-blown personal computer – most of which, after all, are run on Windows operating system – while scorning the efforts of Oracle and Sun Microsystems to win us over to the much simpler and cheaper NC or network computer.

business

Double loss gives Glaxo a headache

Magnus Grimond

Glaxo Wellcome suffered a double blow yesterday after losing a key patent battle in the US and seeing a drug it largely developed launched by a rival. The news that Novopharm, a US drug group, has won permission from a US court to market a rival to Zantac, the UK group's best-selling anti-ulcer drug, coincided with an announcement from rival Zeneca that it was launching Zomig, a migraine treatment which Glaxo was forced by US regulators to sell in September. But the damage had been anticipated by dealers and Glaxo's shares dipped only 4p to £10.86 yesterday.

A Federal appeal court ruled on Friday that Novopharm's application to market a non-patented form of Zantac did not infringe Glaxo's so-called form 2 version of the drug, over which it will continue to hold a US patent until 2002. The unsuccessful appeal, which fol-

lowed a decision against Glaxo in a US district court in North Carolina almost a year ago, means that much cheaper generic forms of Zantac will go on sale when the US form 1 patent runs out in July. Novopharm said it was also ready to launch a generic form of Zovirax, Glaxo's high-selling shingles and genital herpes drug.

The British company is unlikely to appeal further in the Novopharm case and was yesterday playing down the effects of the ruling. A spokesman said: "We have been saying for some time we have been anticipating generic competition."

At the time the company announced its annual results last month, Sir Richard Sykes, chief executive, warned that US sales of Zantac could slump by as much as 80 per cent in the 12 months after the patent expired in July. But he went out of his way to allay City fears about the prospects for the group, saying he expected earn-

ings to be "at least maintained" over the next two years.

Analysts largely agreed that the ruling had done little to change market expectations. Fraser Hall at Barclays de Zoete Wedd said forecasts had been expecting multiple generic competition from July and the only question was whether Glaxo could limit its competitors to, say, two or three, rather than the six to eight expected. He said the group was likely to continue its legal battle against other potential generic producers.

The Zovirax move is seen as less significant. Whereas more than half last year's total Zantac sales of £1.95bn were in the US, less than two-fifths of Zovirax sales were there, making the effects of generic competition on the drug there less severe.

The launch of Zomig in the UK was also heralded last month by Zeneca at the time of its annual results announce-



Advanced warning: Sir Richard Sykes said last month that US sales of Zantac could slump by 80 per cent

approval for the drug from the authorities. Zeneca, which will roll out the drug in other countries during the year, said the world market was expected to be worth £1.5bn by 2000. Analysts expect Zomig could achieve

peak sales of £250m to £300m by early next century.

Separately, Chiroscience, the biotechnology group, announced it had entered into a research alliance with Alcon Laboratories of Texas.

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

Sparkling Far East props up Burmah

Reporting on the same day as Manchester United, it was appropriate that Jonathan Fry should describe 1996 results at Burmah Castrol, where he is chief executive, as a game of two halves. For Burmah that meant disappointment in the developed world of Europe and North America, where the engines of growth are grinding alarmingly, but another sparkling showing from the developing regions of South America and Asia, where they are purring smoothly.

Burmah has been a champion of the Far East for years now - about 75 in the case of India, where it hung on through the dark years of state ownership - and it is now reaping the benefit of liberalised markets in spades. Having overtaken North America in profit terms, the region looks set to leapfrog Europe by the millennium to become the group's biggest earner.

That is just as well because it is an uphill struggle in the old First World to persuade consumers that lubricating oil is anything other than a commodity product and with Mobil attempting to get its recent marriage to BP off to a loving start, price competition is intense. In some ways Burmah has become the Guinness of the petroleum sector, its Castrol suffering the same problems as Johnnie Walker - stagnant markets, a price war to establish market share and the need to back the sales effort with ever-increasing amounts of marketing spend.

Elsewhere the Fosco speciality chemicals acquisition at the beginning of the 1990s nudges ever closer to Mr Fry's neck-on-the-block promise of 10 per cent margins by this year. It should just about make it in time, after last year's 8.3 per cent, but it takes the sort of cheerful optimism that Burmah's ebullient boss specialises in to view that deal as anything but ill-timed, just ahead of recession in the steel and construction markets it serves. It is no wonder that big deals are firmly off the agenda, despite halved gearing at just 22 per cent, until his retirement next year.

The biggest problem facing the company in the short term,

however, is the strength of sterling, which took the shine off last year's figures, but threatens to knock a £20m hole in profits this time if the pound stays at current levels. As a result of that, and the reversal of this year's one-off tax benefit from paying a greater proportion of the final dividend as a foreign income payout, profits will have to rise by about 13 per cent simply to stand still at the earnings line.

Assuming they achieve that, the shares, up 16.5p to 1,014p, trade on a prospective price earnings ratio of 14. A good long-term hold thanks to the company's enviable toe-hold in the Far East but the shares, down from a peak of 1,167p last October, won't excite in the short run.

about the way the club is run. With average attendances up to 54,000 the club could sell the lot to season ticket holders.

But it retains 10,000 tickets for sale on match days to give "hope value" to its 105,000 club members.

It is these "occasional" visitors who spend their money in the club shop, buy a programme and dine out at the Red Café after a visit to the Manchester United museum.

Gate receipts, television money and sponsorship funds are all up strongly. And the appointment of a new deputy chief executive to further the brand overseas is encouraging. The club is already looking at merchandise opportunities in the Far East while at home it is talking to three parties about the possibility of a dedicated Manchester United pay-per-view channel.

Further out, the club may need to look at diversification as its cash pile - currently standing at £22m - continues to grow. But for now there is plenty of room for growth with the core business. If there is a problem it is spiralling wage costs in the aftermath of the Bosman ruling.

But the shares - up a penny at 642p yesterday - have come off their peak in the last couple of months after a terrific run. With analysts forecasting profits of £27.5m they trade on a forward rating of 20. Still worth holding.

Man Utd on the ball

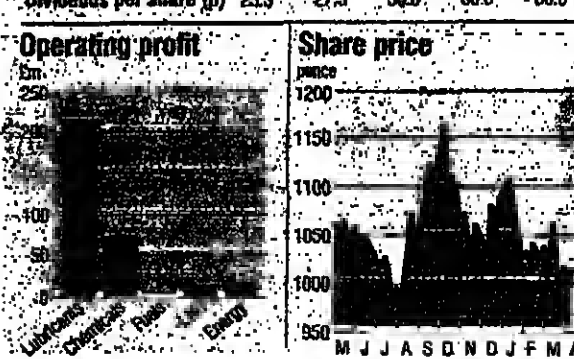
Manchester United's financial progress is as relentless as the club's performances on the pitch. Still top of the league and gunning for glory in the European Cup, the club turned in another impressive display with its first-half figures yesterday.

With profits up 42 per cent to £15.7m before transfer fee income of £3.7m, the business is performing with all the style of an Eric Cantona flick.

But there is nothing flash

Burmah Castrol At a glance

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Market value (£2.15bn, share price 1014p)					
Trading record					
Revenue (£m)	2,240	2,270	2,340	2,410	2,480
Operating profit (£m)	164	192	244	253	272
Pre-tax profits (£m)	164	192	244	253	272
Operating profit margin (%)	7.3	8.5	10.4	10.5	11.0
Dividends per share (p)	25.3	27.5	30.0	33.5	36.8



IN BRIEF

Dwyer Estates to buy 70 properties

Dwyer Estates has exchanged contracts to purchase a portfolio of 70 high-yielding freehold industrial and commercial properties in West and North-west London from Slough Estates for £32.2m cash. The portfolio currently produces an annual income of £3.75m, reflecting a net initial yield of 11.3 per cent after purchase costs. Dwyer Estates said two-thirds of the income was secured on "excellent covenants" including the Department of Environment, Allied Domecq, Renault, Legal and General Assurance Society, Barclays Bank and Malaya Group, while half of the income was secured on leases having unexpired terms of greater than 10 years and 70 per cent were greater than five years.

Norweb US interests sold for £25m

United Utilities has agreed to sell Norweb's generation interests located in the US to Indeck North American Power Fund, a private independent fund which owns and operates independent power projects, for approximately £25m. Norweb's US generation interests comprise 50 per cent partnership interests in each of two independent power projects: a 150MW cogeneration plant in Auburnville, Florida, and a 240MW cogeneration plant in Gordonsville, Virginia. United Utilities said the total value achieved so far under its disposal programme was now £459m, which, it said, significantly exceeded the original target of £350m.

Taylor agrees Stagecoach plans

John Taylor, Minister for Corporate and Consumer Affairs, has accepted Stagecoach Holdings' undertakings to remedy the adverse effects on competition identified by the Monopolies & Mergers Commission as a result of the company's acquisition of Ayrshire Bus Owners (A1 Service). The undertakings restrict Stagecoach's ability to exploit the strength of its position by raising fares and cutting services.

Adams joins House of Fraser

House of Fraser has appointed David Adams as group finance director. Mr Adams is currently finance director of the Asprey Group, which he joined in November 1995. He has spent the past 10 years in the retail industry.

Rexam sells businesses for £25m

Rexam has sold a further four businesses for a total of £25.35m. The businesses - Rexam Containers US and Canada, Tactus and Benham - have a combined annual turnover of £37.8m and make operating profits of £1.5m. Collective net assets are put at £23.5m.

Pordum Foods warns on profits

Pordum Foods, quoted on the Alternative Investment Market, warned that turnover and profits in the current financial year would be substantially below the illustrative projections made in last year's prospectus. The shares fell 1p to 15p after the announcement. The company said recovery in the second half would not be envisaged when the half-year figures were released.

Financial services jobs increase

The number of people employed in financial services in the UK rose over the past three months for the first time since September 1995, according to a joint survey of more than 300 companies by the Confederation of British Industry and Coopers & Lybrand. The survey showed that 38 per cent of the companies increased staff numbers, while 27 per cent reduced jobs.

Universal Salvage shares savaged after warning

Universal Salvage saw its shares tumble by a third after the recently floated car auctioneer warned profits for the year to April would be well below expectations.

Richard Bird, managing director, has left the group with immediate effect following a collapse in the share price to below the 1995 flotation price.

Universal's founder and chairman Cliff Bassett has taken over the reins once more and will act as managing director until a replacement is found.

He said that he was confident a recent deal with Norwich Union would lift profitability this financial year, but his optimism did not prevent the shares, which reached a high of 286p last year, closing 67.5p lower at 135p.

"The company is in a good state. But I'm the first to admit that I'm disappointed by low profitability," he said. "I feel that the following six months will be a decent period. I do not feel uncomfortable about the

company at all." Universal has contracts with several insurance companies to collect and store cars that have been written off.

It then sells them off once claims have been fully processed. It holds 15 per cent of the UK's annual write-offs.

Universal acquired more cars this year than last. However, the number auctioned in the final quarter was significantly lower than expected, following delays by insurance companies in clearing cars for auction.

"We could be criticised for slowness in altering the insurance companies to the problem," said Mr Bassett, adding that there was a backlog in processing an exceptional number of motor claims this winter.

Profit on vehicles sold was also significantly lower than expected in the fourth quarter, though it was higher now than three months ago, he said. The high start-up cost of a tie-up with Norwich Union, also contributed to the slump.

"Norwich Union gave us a very thorough going over, which is a good thing. But it took longer than expected. The infrastructure changes in terms of more staffing to handle the increased and varied salvage did not cost a huge amount, but it was significant," Mr Bassett said.

Universal will have sole rights to handle all vehicles written off each year by the insurer, estimated at around 15,000. The deal is not expected to lift profits until April 1998.

Mr Bassett also said voluntary safety regulations developed in conjunction with the Association of British Insurers and Lloyd's Motor Underwriters Association had dampened profits.

Universal closely vets firms which buy wrecked cars to make sure dangerous cars are not spread up and re-sold.

As a result, more cars are classified as scrap, fetching less than cars capable of being driven away.

Trafficmaster clears the way for profitable year

Chris Hughes

Trafficmaster, which makes in-car traffic-jam warning systems, yesterday reported a 38 per cent leap in losses for 1996 but predicted it would be profitable this year.

Sir Colin McKinnon, chairman, said: "New European developments make the medium and long-term outlook increasingly exciting." He attributed last year's increased losses of £3.4m to a jump in marketing spending of almost £1m.

Turnover was up 35 per cent following Vauxhall's decision in August to fit Trafficmaster's Oracle congestion warning system on at least 100,000 Vectras.

Fourth-quarter sales almost matched those for the rest of the year.

Trafficmaster operates what it claims is the world's only in-car traffic congestion warning system. Roadside infra-red sensors send information about traffic speed to a central office. Subscribing drivers receive spoken or visual broadcasts.

The company hopes Oracle will become a marketable car feature and it hopes to go into the black, following sales of 40,000 Oracle units since December, compared with 56,000 in the previous year, new subscribers and recent deals.

In January Vauxhall decided to make Oracle standard on all

Vectras and extend it to other models. Although other car manufacturers have indicated intentions to fit Oracle, they want to install it in car radios. Trafficmaster said this would delay reaching sales targets and has accelerated plans for a car radio unit, which is due this year.

It also plans a service which reports congestion to cellular telephone users, who can phone for detailed information. It is working with Blaupunkt and Philips to integrate Oracle into their in-car navigation systems.

This month Trafficmaster licensed Germany's Mannesmann Autocom and T-Mobile, part of Deutsche Telekom, to cover the autobahn with Oracle.

Moss Bros keeps going like Blazers

Moss Bros, a name synonymous with suit hire, is hardly a company to set investors' pulses racing. Yet, after a poor recession, Moss has been quietly building a very decent menswear business, for long the Cinderella of the retailing world. The shares, below 800p as recently as a year ago, have more than followed suit, rising another 15p to £13.975 yesterday, near recent highs.

The reason was another cracking set of results, with pre-tax profits up 41 per cent to £15.9m in the year to January. The figures were boosted by a maiden £428,000 contribution to operating profits from the Blazer chain, acquired from Storehouse last June. But underlying that there was still a very healthy 38 per cent improvement from existing operations.

There is still clearly bags of potential in Moss Bros. Despite extra costs involved in integrating the business, Blazer alone produced more profits in seven and a half months with the group

than it achieved in the whole of the previous year, yet margins are less than a third of the average.

The new brand fits into a clutch of high street names which have given Moss near-complete coverage of the market, ranging from Suit Company and Savoy Tailors Guild in the bottom and middle ranges to the likes of Hugo Boss at the fashion end, where from this June it will be joined by the first Yves Saint Laurent branch. Together they have given Moss a tenth of the suit market, a sector whose death was being heralded 10 years ago, but which has been growing at 3 per cent a year since 1992.

Now 164 shops-strong, Moss has identified up to 60 more sites around the country. With net cash of £22.7m, it is well placed to pick and choose. Profits may hit £19m this year, but even with current sales 7.5 per cent ahead and a four-for-one stock split, the shares look high enough on a forward multiple of 20.

Equitas weakens with slump in surplus to £588m

Terry Macalister

Equitas, the reinsurance company set up to handle Lloyd's of London's pre-1993 liabilities, released figures yesterday showing a significant weakening in its financial position.

The first set of accounts revealed that a projected surplus of £880m on 31 December 1995 had shrunk to £588m by 4 September 1996.

The accounts also showed

that the highest paid executive director was Michael Crail, who picked up a total package of £429,312, including a bonus of £123,893 and a "moving allowance" of £75,565 for the eight months up to September.

And his basic salary of £183,884 for that period is set to increase to £275,000 per annum while David Newbigging, chairman, earned £205,636 in the eight months and is now on a basic of £200,000 per annum.

An Equitas spokesman defended the levels of remuneration saying: "We think that they are not overcompensated. The pay is in line with the insurance industry. We need high quality management if Equitas is to succeed."

But nobody is hiding the difficulties facing Equitas. Figures in the maiden set of accounts showed that the group had collected premiums worth £11.2bn while out claims re-

serves remained at £10.5bn. With various extras subtracted this left Equitas with its surplus of £588m, yet the actual level of future claims and payouts remains unclear given the long-tail nature of liabilities for asbestos, pollution and health hazards.

Equitas officials claimed that the group's position has not deteriorated since September and insisted there was no question of its solvency being called into doubt.

But Mr Newbigging also made clear that names, the traditional investors in the Lloyd's market, could still be in the firing line for stumping up extra cash.

He said: "We have two clearly defined objectives which govern our philosophy and business strategy: to endeavour to secure true finality for reinsured names and, in time to endeavour to create sufficient surplus...neither will be easy."

Auditors Coopers and Lybrand qualified the Equitas accounts with warnings about the uncertainty of the reinsurance business.

But there was good news too from the group.

It has finally settled the long-running and expensive liabilities resulting from the Exxon Valdez tanker pollution spill in Alaska. Equitas also outlined plans to move to new premises in St Mary's Axe, City of London.

Company Results

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
CBS Group (p)	4.57m (2.99m)	552,000 (385,000)	5.44p (4.77p)	1.1p
DPS Group (p)	10.09m (14.33m)	1.9m (1.2m)	0.21p (0.27p)	0.75p (0.50p)
Edinburgh Group (p)	70.30m (62.88m)	6,020 (4,480)	19.12p (15.11p)	7.0p (4.5p)
Home Counties News (p)	37.45m (30.46m)	3,320 (1,730)	20.80p (11.70p)	5.5p (5.5p)
Intermediate Capital (p)	-	20,100 (19,070)	28.1p (27.8p)	15.4p
Manchester United (p)	50.11m (29.3m)	19.5m (15.3m)	21.4p (18.3p)	1.3p (1.0p)
Moss Bros (p)	121.85m (87.5m)	15,820 (11,3m)	60.02p (42.53p)	24.0p (18.0p)
MT Holdings (p)	44.96m (42.04m)	6.5m (5.49m)	3.30p (2.70p)	0.8p (0.7p)
Superscope VR (p)	1.8m (1.59m)	-3.13m (-887,000)	-37.4p (-13.1p)	nil
Trafficmaster (p)	3.45m (2.55m)	-3.41m (-2,480m)	-14p (-11.3p)	-

(p) - Final (b) - interim (M) - Nine months

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market report / shares

Data Bank

FTSE 100	4271.7	+35.1
FTSE 250	4518.4	+3.5
FTSE 350	2106.4	+14.0
SEAO VOLUME	683.9m shares	
55,332 bargains		
Gifts Index	93.65	+0.24

“The start of the new tax did not have dealers on their toes, with turnover at best moderate”

Health shares in the pink as punters seek next winner

Taking Stock

MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

Health shares were again in the pink as private investors attempted to pick the next high-flyer. The success of Shield Diagnostic, up from 110.5p this year to 805p last month and 652.5p yesterday, has caused widespread excitement and sent investors scurrying, sometimes indiscriminately, for shares with health aspirations.

Shield, with its heart disease detection test, is clearly the health stakes winner so far this year. The shares, in an erratic day's trading, crashed from their peak when some of its US tests proved inconclusive. But they have steadied, helped by the ending of a tap of institutional selling as a stake was reduced.

Drew, which placed shares with institutions at 52p recently, said last week it was hoping to extend its technology to heart disease. Its headlong gallop appears to have been reined back by stockbroker Wise Speke which cau-



tioned the shares could be running ahead of events.

The excitement was not confined to the second-liners. For the second trading day Smith-Kline Beecham attracted US support, leading blue chips higher with a 35.5p gain to 893p. Medeva put on 6.5p to 312.5p and Zeneca, reflecting the launch of its Zomig migraine treatment, rose 22.5p to 1,762.5p.

Even Glaxo Wellcome, which lost its latest Zantac infringement case in the US, confined its discomfort to a modest 4p fall to 1,086p.

The rest of the stock market was in more confident form with Footsie climbing 35.1

points – a two-day gain of 55.1 – to 4,271.7. The start of the new tax year, however, did not have dealers on their toes with turnover at best moderate. Government stocks had a volatile session. Hit early by talk of big US sales, they closed with gains of around half-a-point.

Financials turned in a strong display with Abbey National up 18.5p to 760.5p and Barclays 24p higher at 1,039p. NatWest Securities was said to be advocating the attractions of banking shares.

PowerGen was out of step, falling 6.5p to 609.5p after warning analysts profits for the year just ended would be

in the £530m to £585m range, below some estimates.

The generator was not the only utility feeling the pinch. Talk of tax cuts and higher rates took its toll with Thames Water off 11.5p to 665p.

Oils were in better shape although British-Born Petroleum Syndicate continued to reflect its disappointing Gulf of Mexico drilling report, falling 89p to 1,302.5p.

Metro, firmed to 20.5p; the group is being split with deputy chairman Robert Adair departing with some of the group's interests. He is paying £2.5m in cash and cancelling half his 34 per cent stake.

BG had another upbeat session as the conviction grew its confrontation with its industry regulator will be less wound-up than at one time thought. The shares gained 5p to 178.5p, equalling their high.

RJB Mining, figures today, improved 35.5p to 390.5p fol-

lowing its “clean coal” link with National Power, off 3p at 502.5p.

Mini-conglomerate Thomas Jordan gained 3.5p to 67p as investors, including former Suter chief David Abell, moved to oust chairman Keith Whitten.

Profit warnings hit Universal Salvage 67.5p to 135p and Pordam Foods, 1p to 1.5p.

The volume was turned down at Verity, off 4p at 48.5p. ED & F Man, the commodities group, fell 7.5p to 178.5p on worries over its links with Cuba.

Prism Rail was shunted 50p lower to 305p on the Save Our Railways report, alleging heavy losses. But the shares rallied to 345p as the company said it “totally refutes” the report.

Masthead Insurance held at a 122p peak. Goshawk Insurance, thought to be stalking Matheson Lloyd's investment trust, has 6.5 per cent.

Woodstock, a pubs and restaurants group, looks destined to be the first off casualty. The remaining directors, led by Marcus Leaver, say they are considering putting the company into liquidation following their failure to arrange a rescue merger with another restaurant chain. Woodstock has three pub/restaurants. It was floated on the fringe share market by Austin Friars Securities last summer at 20p a share when £600,000 was raised. In November the shares were suspended because of irregularities at its pubs off-shoot, Kingstons Inn Co, which subsequently went into receivership.

Hopes of developments at Betacom, Alan Sugar's third-string quoted company, lifted the shares 6p to 65.5p. The electronics group is cash rich and seems set for action.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, grossed up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, including exceptional items.

Other details: Ex rights x Ex-dividend x Ex all x Unlisted Securities Market x Suspended (pp) Parity Paid pm Nil Paid Shares x AM Stock

Source: FT Information

The Independent Index

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Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock Volume Stock Volume Stock Volume Stock Volume

British Steel 230000 BHP 100000 BP 60000 Vodafone 50000

Metroland 230000 Lloyds 70000 RBS 60000 Tesco 50000

Glaxo 150000 Lloyds 70000 RBS 60000 Tesco 50000

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business

When it comes to inflation figures, trust your intuition

When intuition says one thing and the figures say another, trust intuition. In the past few days it has gradually seeped through to the markets that the UK economy has been growing faster than the figures initially suggested. As a result, expectations for a post-election rise in interest rates have shifted up a notch: the issue is whether, a month from now, they will be half a percentage point higher or merely a quarter, while by the end of the year it is beginning to look as though they might be one percentage point up.

There are several reasons for this change in perception. One is that the rise in house prices, always a lead indicator of UK consumption, seems to have shifted up a gear in the first months of this year. Another is the clear evidence of a rise in the rate of increase in earnings. And while the GDP figures do not give any cause for concern, some good work by Lehman Brothers demonstrates they may be wrong. Michael Dick, an economist, looked at the way in which initial estimates of GDP have consistently understated what happened. Just as the statisticians always seem to find that invisible earnings are higher than they first thought, so there always seems to have been more economic activity than the numbers initially catch.

If this is right, the implication would seem to be that not only is the economy growing much faster than was previously thought, it is also closer to full capacity. It follows that the new government will have to tighten policy quickly and since it cannot, for political reasons, do much on the fiscal side, monetary policy will have to bear the burden.

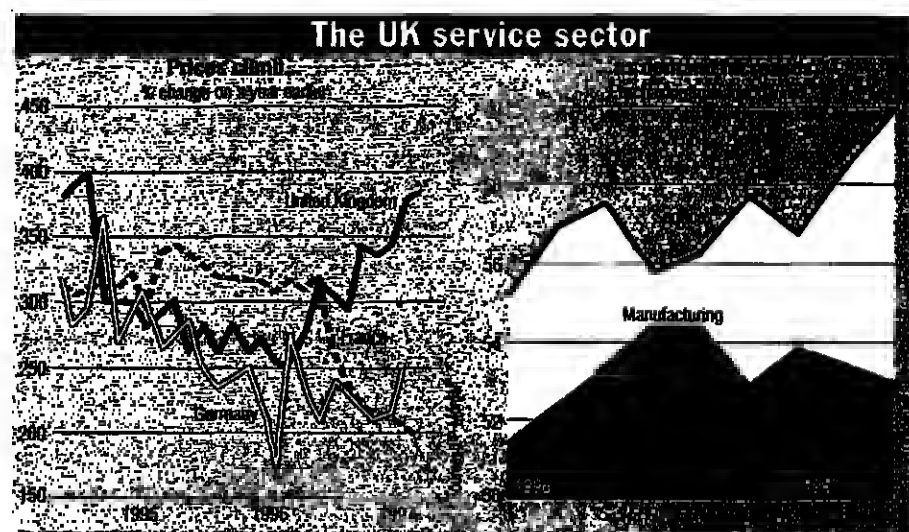
There is a lot in this argument. The core of the problem is that while we have good figures on the manufacturing side of the economy, we have relatively poor ones on the service side. Yet services are much larger, and therefore more important. You can see some of the strain in service sector prices. Until this time last year the rise in UK service sector prices was much the same as those of France and Germany (left-hand graph). But since then UK service prices have climbed steadily. The rise in the service sector is holding down the prices of manufactured goods, does not help much on the services side.

The rise in service sector inflation seems to have been associated with a surge in service sector demand. The best leading indicator of the pressure of demand in manufacturing is the purchasing managers index. Since last July the authorities have been collecting data for the service sector too and the first results were published a fortnight ago. The data is split into different categories but Goldman Sachs has calculated a single index from this and compared it with the manufacturing side (right-hand graph). As you can see, since the beginning of this year there seems to have been a sudden spurt in services, while manufacturing has remained flat. This is further evidence that



Hamish McRae

It follows that the new government will have to tighten policy quickly and since it cannot do much on the fiscal side, monetary policy will have to bear the burden



growth is shifting up a gear at the moment.

So the figures are catching up with what is actually happening and the conclusion that interest rates will have to rise, maybe quite sharply, after the election is reinforced. But that is the short-term, market response. Financial markets sleep, drink and eat interest rates. The wider issue, and it is one which we will hear much more of during the next five years, is whether our predominantly service economy can increase its output at a faster rate than in the past, and if so, how?

Capacity is probably a more flexible concept in services than in manufacturing. The lags are certainly shorter, for the unit size of investments, and hence the lead time in getting investment into service, is shorter. So it should be possible for service industries to respond to increased demand more easily than manufacturing. A rise in demand for services, too, is less likely to suck in imports, because a lot of services cannot be imported.

That means that if there is increased demand which cannot be met by increased output, it has to show in higher

prices rather than increased imports. During the late 1980s boom, soaring imports acted as a buffer, checking the rise in prices of domestic goods that would otherwise have taken place. But that does not answer the capacity questions posed above. There almost certainly is no simple, single answer. It is possible, though, to sketch some parts of a complex one. We know that, provided we approach capacity slowly, we are more likely to be able to stretch it. A slow fall in unemployment is much less likely to lead to a sudden rise in pay rates than a rapid one.

We know too that it takes quite a long time for increased investment in service industries to lead to increased productivity.

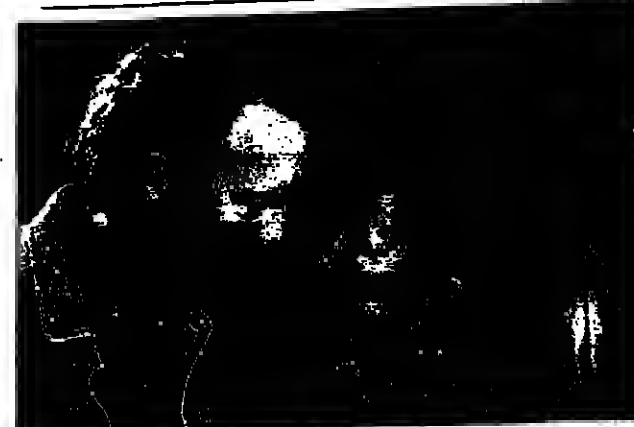
One of the great puzzles of the past 10 years has been the tiny return that seems to have been generated by all the investment that companies have made in information technology. Part of the explanation may be that the investment has resulted in better quality of service and this is not caught in the output stats. But part of the explanation may simply be that it takes a while for new investment in any industry to improve productivity.

Our economy is going through a very rapid structural change. Whole new industries are springing up, while existing ones are transforming their way of business. I think it is perfectly possible that we will see radical improvements in productivity of service industries, which will enable some increase in the "natural" rate of growth of the economy.

But I doubt whether it is possible to do much to foster that growth, for that has to be a bottom-up, market-driven process. The best thing the authorities can do is to provide a stable macro-economic environment which comes back to that next rise in interest rates.

'Brookside' cast as villain when the accent is on jobs

PEOPLE & BUSINESS



Get out of it: Jimmy and Jackie Corkill in Brookside

Jimmy Corkill and the rest of the *Brookside* cast have a lot to answer for. According to yet another survey on regional accents and their resonance in a business environment, Liverpool comes out bottom on a range of perceptions.

According to the Aziz Corporation, a Winchester-based consultancy, strong regional accents can be a distinct disadvantage in business. In a survey of 200 managers in medium-sized businesses only 6 per cent thought a strong accent could be a help.

More than 60 per cent judged business people with a London/Home Counties accent to be generally successful. Those with accents from Newcastle and Liverpool were thought to be successful by only 20 and 16 per cent respectively.

Newcastle bounced back when it came to honesty and trustworthiness, (the Sir John Hall effect, perhaps?). Liverpool came bottom. Businessmen who sounded as though they came from the West Midlands and Birmingham were perceived to be the most hard-working and reliable, while Liverpool and the Home Counties scored badly.

Khalid Aziz, head of the Aziz Corporation, thinks this unfair attitude to Liverpool could be due to "people's perception that the city has been in terminal decline for decades".

"There again, it could be people watching years and years of Alf Garnett referring to his 'scouse git of a son-in-law'."

I think the current *Brookside* soap must be a big culprit. While former drug-dealer and jail bird Jimmy Corkill has "gone straight", there's still more wheedling and dealing in *Brookside* than in a Wild West saloon.

As for the West Country, where I come from, Mr Aziz found that people regard natives of the area as "reasonably OK but a bit slow off the mark". Obviously a deeply flawed survey.

Jonathan Fry, chief executive of Burmah Castrol, has fathered an impressive quartet of daughters. The first, Lucy, works at blue-blooded brokers Cazenove, while the second, Camilla, has clinched a job at Hoare Govett.

Apparently Fry *per se* advised Camilla to stipulate in her contract with the brokers that she should be entitled to time off on Wednesdays and Fridays to attend rugby training with Harlequins, where she plays Number Eight for the women's team.

A proud father says he hopes Camilla may soon play for England.

The world holds its breath at what Fry daughters number three and four, respectively at Edinburgh University and doing A-levels, will achieve.

David Devoto, the recently installed chief executive of *Sunday Business*, the newspaper, was sacked last Thursday, I hear. While Luke

Johnson, son of right-wing columnist Paul Johnson, is the latest majority owner of the paper, it was left to a minor shareholder, Gordon Brown, to give Mr Devoto his marching orders.

Apparently Mr Devoto has become quite used to leaving the newspaper's offices in London's Cavendish Square at high speed. Founder and former editor Tom Ruythoff has hired a security man, a likable ex-boxer called John Cox, to patrol the building. Mr Ruythoff owns the lease to the building and whenever the rent falls due he has instructed Mr Cox to prevent other directors of *Sunday Business* from entering the premises until it is paid.

One person who is still welcome at the building is, surprisingly, Anil Bhoyral, another former editor of the paper.

Mr Bhoyral is an old pal of Mr Ruythoff's and the former is preparing to relaunch *Business*, an investigative magazine founded by Mr Ruythoff which he sold to VNU, which closed it. Mr Ruythoff has rented Mr Bhoyral space in the Cavendish Square building to produce the mag.

John Willcock

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Spot	1 month	3 months	Spot	1 month	3 months
US	1.6257	7.5	23.20	1000		
Canada	2.2642	61.56	170.82	138.84		
Germany	2.2642	61.56	170.82	138.84		
France	3.3624	232.21	675.64	57.71		
Italy	2.2642	61.56	170.82	138.84		
Spain	1.6257	7.5	23.20	1000		
Japan	142.98	24.20	72.36	14.38		
Belgium	3.3624	232.21	675.64	57.71		
Netherlands	1.6257	7.5	23.20	1000		
Sweden	1.6257	7.5	23.20	1000		
Switzerland	1.6257	7.5	23.20	1000		
Australia	2.2642	61.56	170.82	138.84		
Hong Kong	2.2642	61.56	170.82	138.84		
Malaysia	4.0738	2.4	14.4	1.2881		
New Zealand	2.2642	61.56	170.82	138.84		
South Africa	4.0738	2.4	14.4	1.2881		
Singapore	2.2642	61.56	170.82	138.84		

Other Spot Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	16300	0.9959	Nigeria	16300	0.9959
Australia	16300	0.9959	Pakistan	16300	0.9959
Brazil	17221	1.0992	Philippines	43004	0.7170
Canada	17221	1.0992	Portugal	27838	0.7170
China	51401	3.2366	Russia	51401	3.2366
Denmark	51401	3.2366	South Africa	51401	3.2366
France	51401	3.2366	Taiwan	51401	3.2366
Germany	51401	3.2366	Thailand	51401	3.2366
Greece	51401	3.2366	USA	51401	3.2366
India	51401	3.2366			
Italy	51401	3.2366			
Japan	51401	3.2366			
Korea	51401	3.2366			

Forward rates quoted low to high are at a discount; subtract from spot rate.
Rates quoted low to high are at a premium; add to spot rate.
*Dollar rates quoted as percentages.
For the latest foreign exchange rates call 021 123 3033.
Calls cost 50p per minute.

Interest Rates

UK	Base	500%	Germany	Discount	250%	US	Prime	8.75%	Japan	Discount	0.50%
France	Intervention	3.5%	Canada	Prime	4.75%	Spain	Fed Funds	5.25%	Belgium	Prime	2.50%
Italy	Discount	75%	Netherlands	Discount	5.00%	Sweden	3-Month Repo	5.75%	Switzerland	Discount	3.00%
Denmark	Advances	2.70%	Discount	3.25%	Repo (Avg)	4.0%	Lombard	4.25%			

Bond Yields

Country	Yr	yield	10yr	yield	10yr	yield	Country	Yr	yield	10yr	yield
UK	7.0%	7.3%	7.25%	7.8%			Netherlands	2.5%	4.8%	5.75%	6.7%
US	6.87%	6.7%	6.25%	6.8%			Spain	7.0%	6.12	7.25%	6.9%
France	5.8%	1.5%	2.9%	2.4%			Italy	6.25%	7.0%	8.75%	7.6%
Germany	10.0%	7.5%	6.75%	7.3%			Belgium	4.0%	4.8%	5.25%	5.4%
Sweden	8.0%	4.8%	5.0%	5.8%			Switzerland	3.0%	5.8%	5.50%	7.2%
Denmark	4.75%	4.7%	5.50%	5.8%			ECU	4.0%	4.9%	5.50%	6.2%

Money Market Rates

Overnight	7 day	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year
Interbank	4.6%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%
Local Authority	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%
Discount Market	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%
Treasury Bills (91)	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%
ECU	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%

Tourist Rates

£ Buys	2,000	£ Buys	2,000	£ Buys	2,000
Australia (Dollar)	10,700	Germany (Mark)	2,650	New Zealand (Dollar)	10,700
Austria (Schilling)	10,700	France (Franc)	2,650	Norway (Krone)	10,700
Belgium (Franc)	10,700	Italy (Lira)	2,650	Portugal (Escudo)	10,700
Canada (Dollar)	10,700	Japan (Yen)	2,650	Spain (Peseta)	10,700
Cyprus (Pound)	10,700	Malta (Lira)	2,650	Sweden (Krona)	10,700
Denmark (Krone)	10,700	United States (Dollar)	10,700	Switzerland (Franc)	10,700
Holland (Guilder)	10,700			Taiwan (Dollar)	10,700
Finland (Markka)	10,700			Thailand (Baht)	10,700

Life Financial Futures

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	High/Low
Long GB	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long US	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long JPY	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long AUD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long NZD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long HKD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long SGD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long TWD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long KWD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long BHD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04

Life FTSE Index Option

Series	4200	4250	4300	4350	4400
Apr	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416
May	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416
Jun	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416
Jul	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416
Aug	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416
Sep	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416
Oct	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416
Nov	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416
Dec	9416	9416	9416	9416	9416

Energy

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	High/Low	Settlement	High/Low
Long GB	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long US	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long JPY	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long AUD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long NZD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long HKD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long SGD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long TWD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long KWD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04
Long BHD	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04	108.01	108.04

Commodity Indices

Index	Value	Change	Index	Value	Change
Oil	108.01	0.01	Gold	108.01	0.01
Grain	108.01	0.01	Base Metals	108.01	0.01
Softs	108.01	0.01	Energy	108.01	0.01
Metals	108.01	0.01	Chemicals	108.01	0.01
Food	108.01	0.01	Textiles	108.01	0.01
Timber	108.01	0.01	Other	108.01	0.01

Industrial Metals

Shore	Cash	3 mths	Volume	Shore	Cash	3 mths	Volume
Aluminium	1530.51	1505.88	89036	Aluminium	1530.51	1505.88	89036
Copper	2321.24	2283.94	51884	Copper	2321.24	2283.94	51884
Lead	1918.14	1887.75	11138	Lead	1918.14	1887.75	11138
Nickel	5880.85	5730.31	4772	Nickel	5880.85	5730.31	4772
Zinc	1227.58.5	1233.64	38445	Zinc	1227.58.5	1233.64	38445

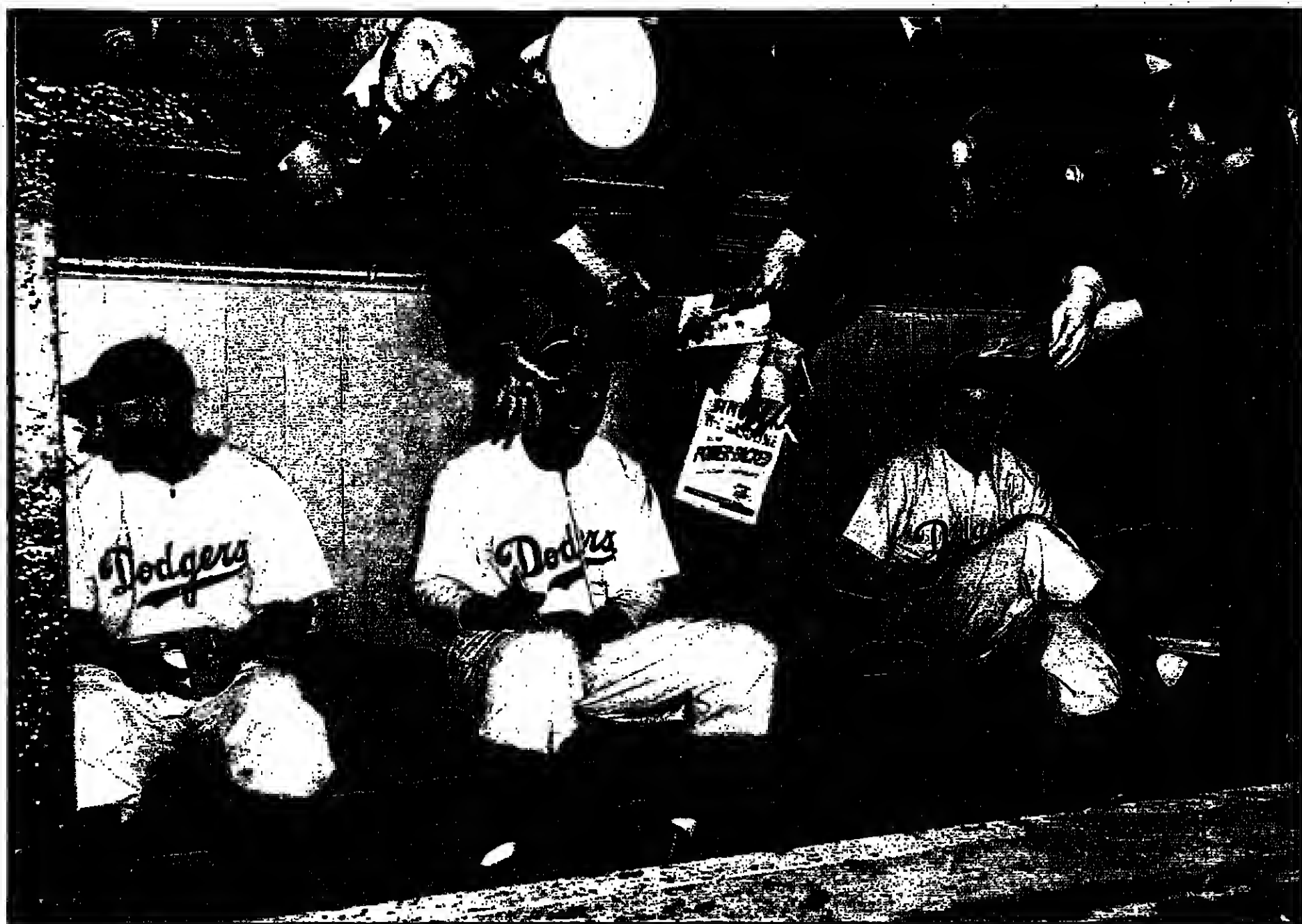
Precious Metals

Shore	Cash	3 mths	Volume	Shore	Cash	3 mths	Volume
Platinum	364.00	324.00	371	Platinum	364.00	324.00	371
Palladium	150.50	152.00	191	Palladium	150.50	152.00	191
Silver	470.20	472.70	34	Silver	470.20	472.70	34
Gold	340.0	343.00	41	Gold	340.0	343.00	41

Agricultural

LIFFE	\$/tonne	LIFFE	\$/tonne
Mar	982	Mar	1575
May	1008	May	1585
Jul	1017	Jul	1600
Vol:	18809	Vol:	3651
White Sugar		Freight	
LIFFE	\$/tonne	LIFFE	\$/100kpi

As America celebrates the breach of the colour bar in baseball 50 years ago, **Rupert Cornwell** considers Jackie Robinson's remarkable career while (below) **John Carlin** examines the contemporary racial balance in US sport



Jackie Robinson signs autographs in his first game for the Brooklyn Dodgers, an exhibition against the New York Yankees at Ebbets Field

Photographs: Corbis-Bettmann/UPI

Legacy of the divine Dodger

Bill Clinton may have cancelled state visits to Latin America and beyond, but there is one event the superpower's temporarily crippled leader does not intend to miss. At around 9pm on 15 April, the middle of the fifth inning will be interrupted in the baseball game at Shea Stadium between the New York Mets and the visiting Los Angeles Dodgers. A black woman in her mid-70s, of serenely striking looks and immense composure, will walk down the players' tunnel and on to the field. Accompanying her will be the President of the United States, on crutches. The two will make their way in a spot near second base. There, Mr Clinton will make an anniversary presentation, watched by probably not a single dry eye among the 55,000 spectators on hand. And for a few illusory instants, America's racial conscience will be salved.

The woman's name is Rachel Robinson. Exactly 50 years earlier, at a baseball stadium not many miles from Shea, her husband took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers and became the first black major league player of the modern era. Baseball is dedicating the 1997 season to the memory of Jackie Robinson. Given America's genius at marrying history, maudlin sentiment and crass commercialism, hyperbole is inevitable. But nothing, not the Robinson stickers or badges or drinks, nor the specially minted gold coins, even the hollow self-congratulation unique to baseball, can obscure a simple fact. Jackie Robinson's breach of baseball's colour barrier was the most important single sporting moment of the American century. That bleak spring afternoon, a decade before its time, the civil rights movement was born, and America's national pastime became truly that – and what's more, at the home of America's team.

In no sport anywhere on earth, surely, is there anything to match the tyranny of nostalgia exercised by Brooklyn's Dodgers. Forty years have passed since the owner, Walter O'Malley, took the franchise to Los Angeles, earning himself a spot in the borough's 20th century roll of infamy.

Today, the pilgrimage to Brook-

lyn is a melancholy affair. Only a few clues remain of the original Boys of Summer. An old Dodgers pennant flies atop the town hall, and at the intersection of Third Avenue at 75th Street you will find the Brooklyn Dodger. "The Most Famous Sports Bar in New York", its facade painted in the team's creamy-white and blue, its interior adorned with team memorabilia, arrayed like holy relics. But Ebbets Field, the Dodgers' beloved old stadium, survives only as a name on a couple of undistinguished apartment blocks.

Saddest of all are a few bedraggled flyers affixed to walls and lamp-posts. "Bring the Dodgers Back". Earlier this year the O'Malley family put the LA Dodgers on the market, and Howard Golden, Brooklyn's chief executive, launched a campaign to bring them home from the West

The choice was crucial, for a botched experiment might set the integrationist cause back by years

Coast. Which is fine – except that the price tag is at least \$350m (£220m), double the record paid for a major league baseball franchise. Even in the improbable event that Brooklyn find the money, relocation would be blocked by the Mets and New York's other major league team, the Yankees. Deep down, every Brooklynite knows the Mohican Indians have a better chance of regaining Manhattan than the borough has of reclaiming its stolen Dodgers.

But their ghost grows more luminous by the year. In truth, as often as not, Ebbets Field was half empty. For those of a certain age, however, the Brooklyn Dodgers have metamorphosed into myth, an emblem of a vanished post-war golden age when order and decency and certainty prevailed, and America's church clock was fixed forever at 10

to three. Unarguably, they were a wonderful team, especially for the 10 seasons Jackie Robinson played alongside the likes of Roy Campanella, Duke Snider, and Pee Wee Reese, Hall-of-Famers all. But with the glorious and indelible exception of 1955, they would always lose the World Series to the hated, overweening Yankees. Even that, however, was essential to the myth. The Dodgers were human, accessible, lovable. Most important, they were underdogs. With every failure, Brooklyn and America loved them more. "Dem Bums", or better still "Our Bums", entered the standard grammar of American-English.

But nothing contributed as much to their aura as the arrival of Robinson. His presence on a major league field – a full seven years before the Supreme Court's 1954 epochal ruling that outlawed segregated education and ushered in the civil rights era – was baseball's noblest moment. For once a sport that usually had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the latest innovation was leading the way. And "Dem Bums", Brooklyn's finest, were leading baseball with an innovation that would change pro sports here forever. Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson, baseball superstars Ken Griffey and Albert Belle, even young Tiger Woods, all are indebted to Jackie Robinson.

It all began in 1942, when Branch Rickey became the Dodgers' general manager in Brooklyn, a man who would revolutionise the business of baseball. In those days, American sport was almost entirely segregated. Not since 1884 had a black played major league baseball. True, Joe Louis held the heavyweight championship, and Jesse Owens was the most acclaimed ath-

lete on earth (though he had to migrate from his native Alabama to Ohio in the north to prosper). But for the rest, black and white inhabited separate universes.

Then Rickey produced his masterpiece of enlightened self-interest. He knew the team had to be improved after the war, and what better source of fresh talent than the Negro League, which by then was producing individual talents to match anything white baseball could offer. A deeply religious man, Rickey opposed segregation on moral grounds – but he was no less concerned with the earthly wellbeing of the Dodgers. The recruitment of a black player thus had an irresistible logic. The problem was, which black player? The choice was crucial, for a botched experiment might tear baseball apart on the field and set back the integrationist cause by years, if not decades. Finally his eye alighted on Jackie Robinson Roosevelt, an ex-serviceman playing for the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro League.

His pedigree was outstanding. As an athlete, Robinson had it all: strength, co-ordination and a speed befitting the brother of Mack Robinson, predecessor of Owens as world record holder at the 220 yards sprint. More important still, he possessed the right temperament. He was brave, dignified and acutely aware of his impending place in history. Rickey was looking for a saint as much

as a sportsman, a person of divine restraint who would not retaliate, whatever the provocation. At their decisive meeting in August 1945, Robinson asked at one point: "Mr Rickey, do you want a ball player who's afraid to fight back?" "No", came the answer, "I want one with the guts not to fight back. You've got to do this with hits and catches and stolen bases, Jackie. Nothing else."

A few months later Robinson joined the Dodgers' top farm team, the Montreal Royals. So brilliantly did he play that his promotion was inevitable. The brief, momentous announcement came on 10 April, 1947: the Brooklyn Dodgers had purchased Robinson's contract "with immediate effect". He would be paid \$5,000, the then minimum salary for a major leaguer. Five days later, he ran out on to Ebbets Field before 25,623 spectators, to face the Boston Braves.

Hillless in four at bats, Robinson's debut that chilly afternoon of April 1947 was utterly forgettable. "I did a miserable job," he confessed later. But his season was a triumph. Named Rookie of the Year, he helped the Dodgers to the World Series (where, needless to relate, they lost to the Yankees). His hitting, his slooping plays in the infield and above all his gazelle-like speed on the bases were electrifying. And that despite an outpouring of abuse from rival players and crowds that might have driven a lesser man to suicide.



Robinson (right) passes home plate in a triple steal in a game against the Cincinnati Reds. During matches Robinson would be the target of players' and spectators' racist threats, taunts and insults

mates as they dithered in the dressing-room. "But I'm going out to play."

The worst were Brooklyn's games with the Phillies. "Of all the unpleasant days of my life," Robinson later wrote, "22 April, 1947 brought me closer to cracking up than I had ever been." It was the Dodgers' first series in Philadelphia, and racial loathing gushed from the dugout housing the team from the City of Brotherly Love. "Hey, snowflake, which one of those white boys' wives are you dating tonight?" and "They're waiting for you in the jungles, black boy," were two of the milder taunts.

But elsewhere it could be almost as bad. During some especially vicious heckling later in the season, Pee Wee Reese called a time out. He trotted across from shortstop, put his arm around Robinson's shoulder, and looked steadily out around the crowd.

Robinson had it all: he was brave, dignified and acutely aware of his impending place in history

It was a gesture worth dozen a grand slam homers – not least because Reese had initially asked to be traded to another club when he learnt a black player was joining the Dodgers. At the end of the season Robinson almost had a nervous breakdown. "Few people know about it," Don Newcombe, a black pitcher recruited by the Dodgers in 1948, revealed last year. "Rachel, God bless her, took him on a three-week boat trip when it was over. It saved him."

And the breakthrough had been made. In July 1947, Larry Doby became the first black to play in the American League, for the Cleveland Indians, and nine by nine the other clubs followed suit, last among them the Boston Red Sox in 1959. Even so the process was gradual, and woodrow were the reasons

clubs found to turn down the greatest black players. Hank Aaron had "a hitch in his swing," sniffed one general manager, who one hopes had the decency to blush when Aaron hit the 715th homer of his career in 1974 to break Babe Ruth's record – a feat which predictably earned him racist harrumphs by the sackful. The peerless Willie Mays, it was deemed, "couldn't handle a curveball." The deficiency did not stop him clubbing 660 home runs, third on the all-time list. Mays would explain: "I just had to be three or four times better than the whites."

Even integration on the field could not expunge the endless indignities of pre-civil rights America off it: the segregated restaurants, hotels and transport in the south, and the refusal of two stadiums in Florida to allow Robinson to play there in spring training. "They said the floodlights weren't working... pretty strange for an afternoon game." The Dodgers would temporarily settle the problem by spending March in Cuba.

Jackie Robinson never made the sad migration to Los Angeles. The Dodgers traded him to the cross-town Giants in November 1956, and three weeks later he retired, with a career batting average of .311 and having helped the Dodgers to six National League pennants and their lone world championship. In 1962 he was elected the first black member of baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Later he would upset many blacks by becoming a Republican and supporting Richard Nixon. Always, though, he was a passionate advocate of civil rights and racial equality. For his impact on American society, Muhammad Ali is the only athlete who runs him close.

White-haired and half blind, Robinson died tragically young in 1972. The medical reason was diabetes, but many believe that the ordeals of his baseball years basted the end. He would be 78 today, and surely disappointed at how race still oppresses and distorts American life. "Jackie was very impatient for change," Rachel Robinson said recently. "There is considerable retrenchment in our society now, and if he were alive today he would think we have not come far enough."

Talent takes the higher ground in a ruthless world

Professional basketball players in the United States earn an average annual salary of \$2m (£1.25m); baseball players \$1.1m; American football players \$767,000. Since more than 1,700 of the 3,200 sportsmen who play in the three big leagues are black, this would suggest that any lingering controversies about racial equality in American sports have been smacked firmly out of the ballpark.

But are these figures deceptive, as some would argue? Do they mask a subtle but powerful racial bias? A recent article in *US News and World Report* noted that all of the club presidents and chief executives in Major League Baseball and the Na-

as were 93 per cent of those in the National Basketball Association.

These statistics could be interpreted as the stark expression of a truth that dare not speak its name. Or almost doesn't dare. At Campanis, a senior official at the Los Angeles Dodgers, bluntly volunteered the thought on network television 10 years ago that blacks "may lack some of the necessities" to succeed as baseball executives. "They are gifted with great musculature and various other things. They are fleet of foot. As far as having the background to be a club president, I don't know."

Campanis was out of a job within 48 hours, which showed how far American sport – like American

society – had come since the days of Jackie Robinson in addressing the cosmetic niceties of race. A handful of other white sports figures since have endured suspensions and fines for less offensive deviations from the politically correct norm.

Yet the question is still asked, notably by civil rights leaders whose job is to ask such things, whether America has truly moved away from the stereotype of black sportsmen as muscled athletes short on brains. The answer, everything indicates, is that progress has been made and it is both premature and unfair to cast American sports in a harsh light.

There was a time when the unwritten rule in basketball, according

to an old joke, was that you played three black players at home, four away and five if you were losing. But that was before black Americans gained full political equality with the passing of the Civil Rights Act 33 years ago, since when American sport has emerged as arguably the country's most reliably fair equal opportunity employer. As for the point about who owns the teams, money in America remains concentrated, for obvious historical reasons, in white hands and so the statistics about presidents and chief executives could be seen as bordering on the gratuitously tendentious.

A better test of how far things have advanced on the racial front may be found in the number of head coaches at the leading clubs. At first glance the figures are not encouraging. In major league baseball there are three out of 28 in the NFL there have been three out of 30, now there are two. In the NBA there are five out of 28.

But no less revealing are the figures for the number of assistant coaches, for these provide a better indicator of possible progress to come. In the NBA, where each team has six coaches in all, 28 out of 157 are black – about the same percentage as play on the field and higher than the percentage of blacks in the population as a whole, which is just under 12 per cent. In the NFL, 85 out of 380 assistant coaches are

black. In the NBA 25 out of 59 are black.

All of which indicates that it is simplistic to argue, as the *Washington Post* did last week, that while the colour barriers have been lifted on the field, off it they still stand. As for the drawn versus brain debate, American professional sport is first and foremost a ruthless business and anyone who imagines that the black men occupying vital coaching positions in basketball, football and baseball are there for reasons of charity is inhabiting a world of paranoid fantasy.

Michael Jordan earns \$52.6m (£32.8m) a year, if you add the endorsement money, because he is a

remarkable athlete but also because he is blessed with a superior tactical intelligence. None of his millions of fans – black or white – is in any doubt about that.

As for golf, a game which requires more mental discipline than any other, whatever stereotypes might remain Tiger Woods is busy smashing them to smithereens.

The truth about American sport today is that there is no purer meritocracy. Talent, not race, is what defines success. Money counts too, at another level, but in a couple of years both Jordan and Woods will be in a position to buy their own teams and, if they so choose, to name themselves presidents and chief executives too.

April 10 1997

Going clear: Lord Gyllene and the ill-fated Smith's Man (far side) sail over Aintree's water jump yesterday Photograph: Julian Herbert/Allsport

Huddle er

SOUTHWELL
2.15: 1. WATER GARDEN (M Hrs) 7-2:
2. Mr Paradise 5-11.3. Honourable 7-4 (Inv.
9 van. Str-hd, 1½ IG Wragg, Newmarket).
Total: £4.70, £1.10, £3.00, £1.10. DF:
£19.80. CSF: £19.49. Ths: £5.70.

2-45: 2. MILA'S RELATIVE (R French)
11-10: 2. Bon Guest 7-2; 3. Sheep Hully
20-1. 6 ran. 1-4, 4. (R Guest, Nonmar-
ried). Total: \$1.00, \$2.00, \$5.00, Df:
\$3.00, \$5.00

The divine Dodger
Rupert Cornwell recalls a great
American sportsman, page 25

sport

Hodde joins fan club
Glenn Moore hears the England
coach support Man Utd, page 27



150th GRAND NATIONAL: New Zealand's finest leads from start to finish in high class end to unhappy episode

Lord the master of a grand Monday

RICHARD EDMONDSON
reports from Aintree

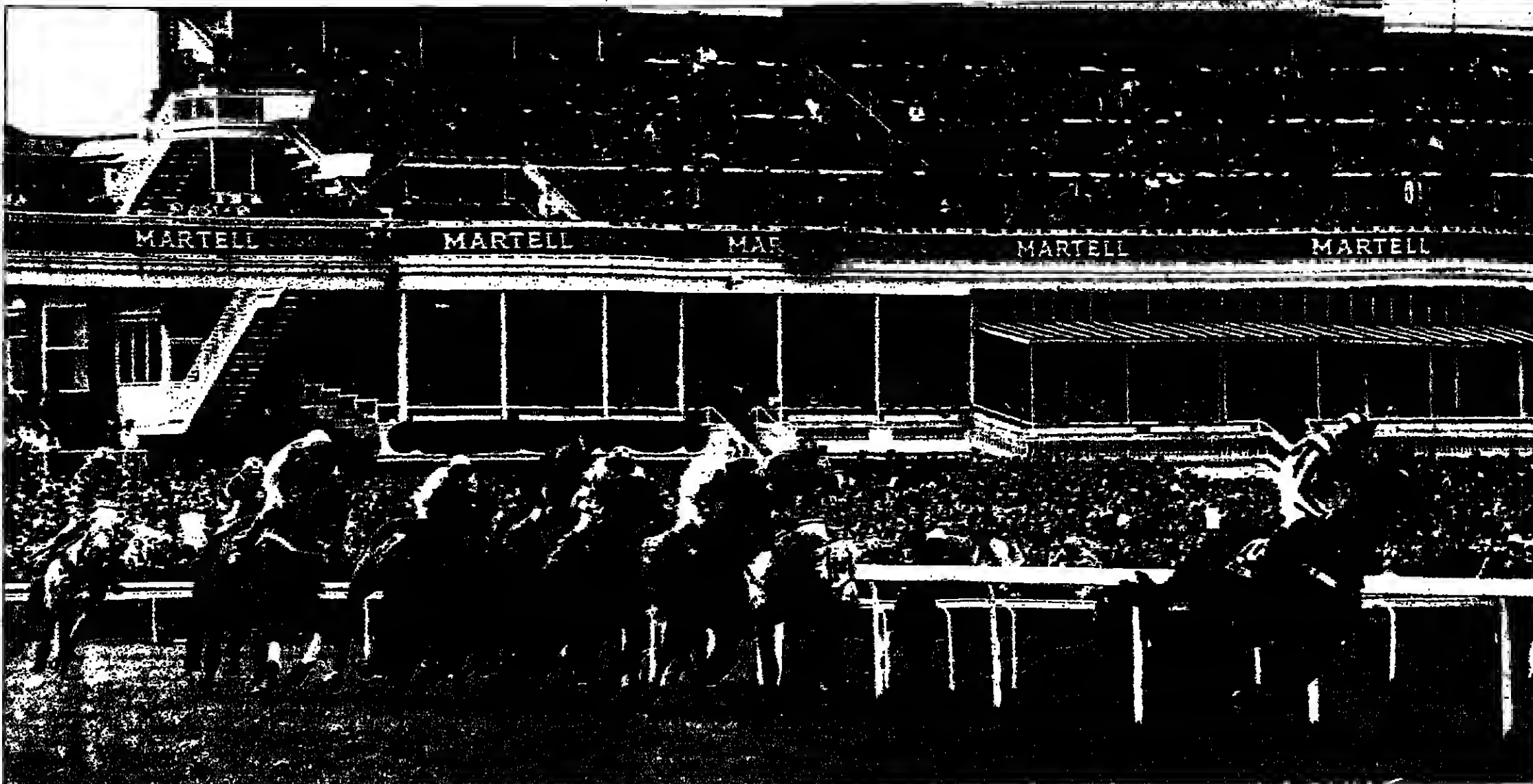
Only a performance of huge merit at Aintree yesterday could have expunged the memory of what had gone before, but there was only one horse in the race. Lord Gyllene led from start to finish, won by 25 lengths and ensured there was at least one noble intervention in the 150th Grand National.

The diminution in spectator numbers may have taken something from the occasion, but this was not a factor that struck Tony Dobbin as he pushed his nine-year-old mount further and further ahead on the run-in. "I thought it might not have been the same atmosphere for the race and it wasn't," the jockey said. "It was better."

Lord Gyllene is the product of an unlikely National factory as he was bred and reared on the grasslands of New Zealand. He was bought not out of a field, but rather out of a video box after his owner, Stan Clarke, watched film of the gelding. But then Clarke himself departs far from the norm.

The Staffordshire businessman is a member of the Jockey Club who has built up a property company which recently announced pre-tax profits of £11.7m. He has travelled some way since he began his working career aged 11, accompanying the local butcher on his horse and cart during the day and working in a chemist's at night. Yesterday it was his horse's opponents who looked as though they were pulling a carriage behind them, and 17 other gaping finishers who appeared in need of medication.

The winning team is completed by the trainer, Steve Brookshaw, a trainer well known in hunting and pointing circles but rather less prominent figure in National Hunt racing. He has been training for just two years. Brookshaw will tell you his family deserves to have their name on the scroll. In 1959, his uncle Tim should have won the National on Wyndburgh but his stirrup leathers soaped at



Leading the line: The eventual winner, Lord Gyllene (right), takes the field round the first bend for the second time in the Grand National yesterday

Photograph: Robert Hallam

Becher's Brook before he finished second to Oxo.

The omens did not look that portentous for Lord Gyllene just before the off as he drifted from 10-1 to 14-1 in the betting. As soon as the tape went up however, the field was chasing the horse in the green and white go faster stripes. The leader bounced along throughout with his ears pricked, the equine equivalent of clicking the heels in the air as you walk down the pavement.

Those that were first into his

hoofprints were Suny Bay, who was tugged along into second place, and the poor Smith's Band, who died immediately after falling at the 20th. Straight Talk too will never be seen again after breaking a leg.

Dobbin's only problem came as the field passed the straight, when a loose horse tried to remove him from the racecourse. The man from Northern Ireland dared only to look over his shoulder in the closing stages and then he would have been struck

by a pleasant myopia. "I didn't look back until half-way up the run-in and I didn't care how far ahead I was," he said. "I wasn't going to stop riding him because he was idling out there."

A short time later he afforded himself a quick punch of the air and a quick pinch of his trusty conveyance's right ear, as the race was secured.

A grey and chill morning had dawned at Aintree under a gunmetal sky. The ongoing police operation became visible at

daybreak as officers once again searched the entire 250-acre site. Policemen with metal detectors checked the bristling fences for devices (as if there was not enough peril inherent in the obstacles).

The police operation was so thorough that it soon became clear that customer comfort was a lesser priority behind ensuring the 150th Grand National was run as a defiant signal to those who had caused Saturday's abandonment. There were huge

numbers of officers to shepherd the visitors, the sort of security ratio to which Reggie Kray has become accustomed.

Paul Stephenson, the assistant chief constable of Merseyside police, had, according to a press release, said: "Racegoers are going to experience a very high level of security and they are going to be searched when they come in. Everyone can be guaranteed that our No.1 priority is public [sic] safety." This went some way to explaining the thoroughness

of the frisking all had to endure at the entrances.

Water jets were thrown on to the course until mid-afternoon, changing the going from good to firm to good. This was enough to secure the participation of Charlie Brooks's Suny Bay, who ran only after his trainer and owner had walked the course. Over The Stream, as expected, was pulled out as he had become dehydrated during the confusion of Saturday.

Well after the gates opened at 2pm Aintree had the feel of a film set before the arrival of the cast and crew. However, a sense of stubbornness in the face of the enemy and the free entrance

meant the official attendance eventually grew to an estimated 25,000, a warning figure in view of the fact that some enclosures were closed to the public.

The most voluble figure in the stands as the bay powered home was the man who pays the hotel bills at the horse's Preston Farm dips at Uffington near Shrewsbury. "I cheered and cheered and cheered and made a right fool of myself," Stan Clarke said. But Clarke was not the fool of this Grand National, and the cheers of yesterday set out a message to those who tried to damage the great event.

More Aintree reports and pictures, page 26

WHERE YOUR MONEY WENT: A GUIDE TO THE FINISHERS AND FAILURES

1st LORD GYLLENE 14-1	7th Killashin 33-1	13th Turning Trix 25-1
2nd SUNY BAY 8-1	8th Dakyns Boy 100-1	14th Pink Gin 100-1
3rd CAMELOT KNIGHT 100-1	9th Nalthen Lad 14-1	15th New Co 40-1
4th BUCKBOARD BOUNCE 40-1	10th Valiant Warrior 50-1	16th General Wolfe 16-1
5th Master Oats 25-1	11th Antonia 14-1	17th Evangelica 33-1
6th Avro Anson 12-1	12th Northern Hide 66-1	

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3267, Tuesday 8 April By Aired Monday's Solution

ACROSS

- Elementary way of finding age (6,6)
- Upper-class doctor's anger causes offence (7)
- Sweet producing a spot of gingivitis? (7)
- Writer visiting Jerusalem finds a place to stay (7)
- Provocative sailor rejected with anger (5)
- Flirt to irritate one Vatican City worker (9)
- Police man has power in popular area (9)
- What, in support of golfer, makes one laugh (2-3)
- Great Dames feature here as names in boats (7)
- One subject to no charge has to spend time in cell (7)
- Machine-minder? (7)
- How to get naked ape? (4,3)
- When Zinoviev's missile arrived? (3-6,3)
- Shoot, in vicious act, government leaders (7)
- Yet liar could produce the truth? (7)
- Done thing is to relax until morning (9)
- Understand Information Technology would use many such (5)
- Timothy has to criticise one's percussion (7)
- Aim of Buddhist leaders going into revolutionary Iran (7)
- Cause of inflation to US money which Germans swallow (12)
- Reportedly taste something not to put in mouth - paint mixer (7,5)
- Slicky glasses (9)
- Indie's flourishing, end of The Times will be announced later (4,3)
- Second half of frieze at German town depicts a prophet (7)
- US haulage firm did right in having folded (7)
- Damage to old city produces unity (7)
- Empty enclosure in street (5)

DOWN

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DEXTRA DOVE 33-1 pulled up 27th

GRANGE BRAKE 100-1 refused 21st

LO STREGONE 14-1 pulled up 27th

FEATHERED GALE 16-1 pulled up 27th

BACK BAR 100-1 fell 7th

GLEMOT 50-1 unseated rider 7th

SPUFFINGTON 100-1 unseated rider 22nd

WYLDE HIDE 11-1 unseated rider 22nd

MUGONI BEACH 100-1 pulled up 21st

RIVER MANDATE 50-1 pulled up 21st

SCRIBBLER 100-1 pulled up 21st

SMITH'S BAND 12-1 fell (dead) 20th

FULL OF OATS 33-1 fell 1st

CELTIC ABBEY 66-1 unseated rider 15th

GO BALLISTIC 7-1 fell pulled up 29th

BISHOPS HALL 50-1 pulled up 29th

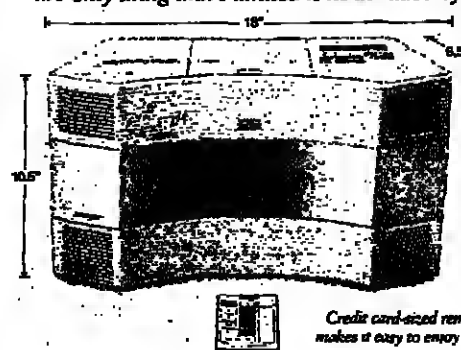
STRAIGHT TALK 50-1 fell (dead) 14th

NUAFFE 100-1 fell 11th

DON'T LIGHT UP 100-1 fell 13th

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